THE HISTORY OF ROCK

1988

A MONTHLY TRIP THROUGH MUSIC'S GOLDEN YEARS

THIS ISSUE: 1988

REM

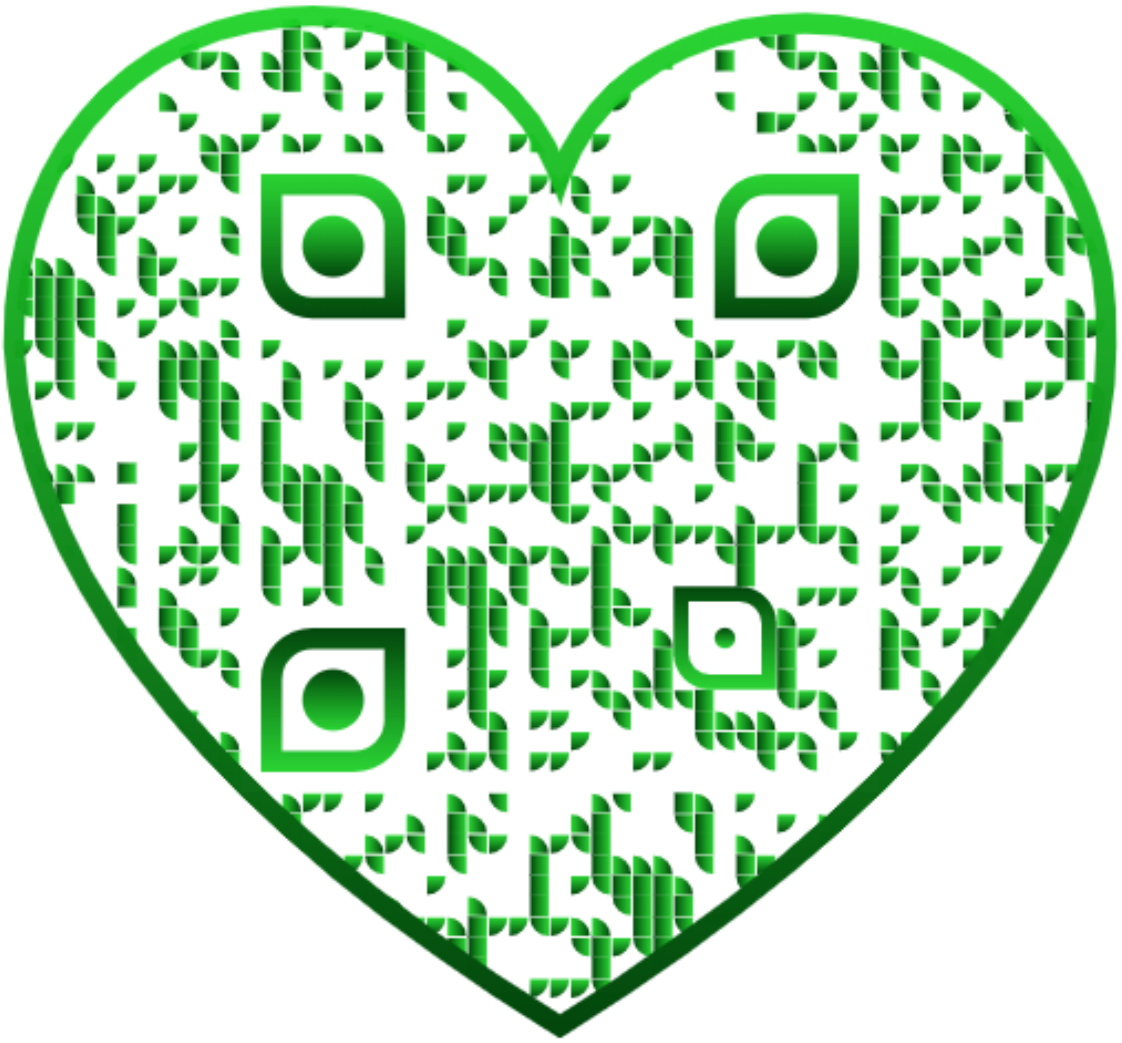
"There's unrest in the air"

FROM THE ARCHIVES OF NME & MELODY MAKER

STARRING...

NICK CAVE
PATTI SMITH
ROBERT PLANT
RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS
SINEAD O'CONNOR
THE POGUES
MORRISSEY
PRINCE
U2

PLUS! PIXIES | ACID HOUSE | WITHNAIL AND I | THE WEDDING PRESENT



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1988

MONTH BY MONTH

Welcome to 1988

AMONG OTHER HAPPENINGS, this is a year when a new dance genre – acid house – helps create what is reported as a "new summer of love". Still, the harmony, experimentation and revolutionary spirit that accompanied that original summer of '67 is this year created not only by electronic artists – and is certainly not confined to the warmer months.

Take our cover stars REM. In the space of a few years, they have grown from a lively and mysterious post-punk outfit into a concerned and influential rock band, backing presidential candidates and making a thoughtful pop record, *Green*. U2 continue to convince the fans in the stadia, hobnob with the greats, and exercise their power to effect change.

Harmony exists between artists of different eras. New appearances by (and new interviews with) acts like Townes Van Zandt and Patti Smith illustrate how an enduring artist will always be able to find a place in music's continuum. Robert Plant can even find the odd nice word to say about The Mission, produced by his former colleague John Paul Jones.

Elsewhere, the parallels continue. Great new acts are mobilising grass-roots support. A confluence is occurring between sonic and chemical experimentation. British tabloid newspapers, meanwhile, are conspiring to turn something as generally benign as acid house into a point of moral outrage.

This is the world of *The History Of Rock*, a monthly magazine which follows each turn of the rock revolution. Whether in sweaty club or huge arena, passionate and stylish contemporary reporters were there to chronicle events. This publication reaps the benefits of their understanding for the reader decades later, one year at a time. Missed one? You can find out how to rectify that on page 144.

In the pages of this 24th edition, dedicated to 1988, you will find verbatim articles from the music weeklies' frontline staffers, filed from the thick of the action, wherever it may be.

Taking a trip to Boots the chemist for an interviewee to sort out his methadone allowance. Buying more drinks for Peter Buck, even though he's carrying a knife. Being uncomfortably trodden upon as The Mission make their journey to the summit of American fame.

"Sorry I stood on your bollocks earlier," Wayne Hussey tells the *MM*'s man.

Still unchanged by fame, he indicates a nearby bowl of ice water. "You can dangle them in there if you want…"

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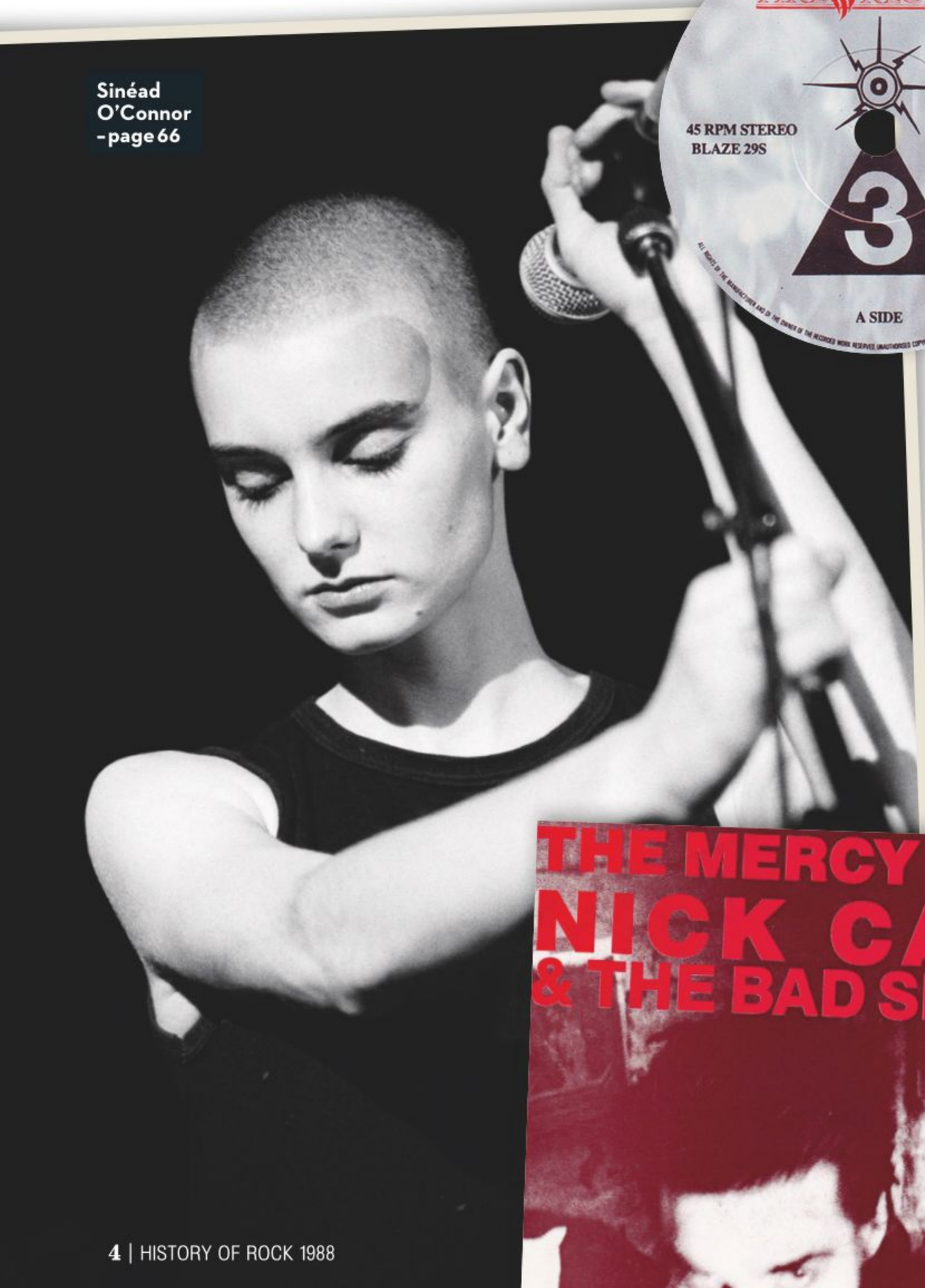

FRANS SCHELLEKENS / GETTY

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new club phenomenon, in which music, as well as drugs, may also possibly be involved.

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THE HISTORY OF ROCK

Time Inc. (UK) Ltd, 3rd Floor, Blue Fin Building, 110 Southwark St, London SE1 0SU | **EDITOR** John Mulvey, whose favourite song from 1988 is *And A Bang On The Ear by The Waterboys* **DEPUTY EDITOR** John Robinson *Revolution by Spacemen 3* **ART EDITOR** Lora Findlay *There She Goes by The La's* **PRODUCTION EDITOR** Mike Johnson *Feed Me With Your Kiss by My Bloody Valentine* **ART DIRECTOR** Marc Jones *Somewhere In My Heart by Aztec Camera* **DESIGNER** Becky Redman *Cover Girl by New Kids On The Block* **PICTURE EDITOR** Phil King *Sidewalking by The Jesus And Mary Chain* **COVER PHOTO** Chris Carroll / Getty **THANKS TO** Helen Spivak **MARKETING** Nashitha Suren **SUBSCRIPTIONS** Rachel Wallace **GENERAL MANAGER** Jo Smalley **GROUP MANAGING DIRECTOR** Paul Cheal **COVERS AND TEXT PRINTED BY** Wyndeham Group | **WWW.UNCUT.CO.UK**

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TERRY MCGINNIS / GETTY

1988

JANUARY – MARCH

MORRISSEY, NICK CAVE, TOWNES VAN ZANDT, THE MISSION AND MORE

"First concerts for six years"

NME FEB 6 Pink Floyd are playing live!

PINK FLOYD ARE playing their first British concerts in more than six years this summer, as predicted in the *NME* six months ago.

The dates were announced in a frenzy of publicity on the Thames last week with a giant inflatable bed (as featured on the sleeve to the album *A Momentary Lapse Of Reason*) being launched near the Houses Of Parliament. A total of 30,000 pink balloons were launched in major cities all over the country to herald the announcement of the tour, their first since *The Wall* concerts in 1981.

The Floyd, with a nucleus of David Gilmour, Nick Mason and Richard Wright, are playing Manchester City Football Ground (August 1 and 2) and London Wembley Stadium (August 5 and 6).

Tickets are available from a series of outlets, and also on a credit card hotline: 01 748 1414, 01 379 6131 and 01 836 4114, subject to booking fee.

They are also available by post from either Pink Floyd Manchester, PO Box 4, Altrincham, Cheshire WA14 2JQ, or Pink Floyd Wembley, PO Box 141, London SW6 5AS.

Manchester tickets are £15.50 plus 50p booking fee, and London tickets are £16.50 plus 50p booking fee. Make all cheques and postal orders payable to Kennedy Street Enterprises and enclose a stamped addressed envelope.

NILS JORGENSEN / REX / SHUTTERSTOCK

Floyd bedlam

January 28, 1988: Pink Floyd publicise stadium dates in Manchester and London via an(other) inflatable on the river Thames

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"Telexes from the past"

NME FEB 13 Bruce Robinson explains his film creation, *Withnail And I*.

"This place has become impossible": (l–r) Richard E Grant, Bruce Robinson and Paul McGann on the set of *Withnail And I*

TALL, EFFUSIVE, GIVEN to many florid turns of phrase, Bruce Robinson is sipping lager, alternatively raging and reminiscing. Now a comfortably off suburban family man who likes a pheasant and some good wine at dinner, it's nonetheless the rank squalor and capsizing dreams of dearest Albion that fuel his writing. His semi-autobiographical movie *Withnail And I* may be the best end-of-an-era England-in-an-acid-bath comedy since the halcyon days of Ealing.

"To a large extent Withnail is myself – I certainly have a predilection for verbosity. But it wasn't like I wandered round in the late '60s saying, 'Oh, this is a good idea, let's write about it.' You could say it's like unrecorded telexes from the past with satire and caricatures added. Had I really tried to remember all the things we said and did, it wouldn't have been that funny."

By 1969, when the movie is set, the sun doesn't shine any more, there're no dayglo dreamers. What happened to the Summer Of Love, Bruce?

"There was so much media hype – we were all meant to have marigolds up our arse, shagging each other all night, taking LSD. It wasn't like that – everyone I knew was on National Assistance, and a trip cost a quid, which was relatively expensive."

Quintessentially English, there's no sexiness in Withnail, just sexual fear. The I character is hounded by the sad, repressed homosexual Uncle Monty, the personification of a ghost in upper-class England's closet.

"The basic reason for not having women in the film was to heighten the degradation of these two guys. I remember clearly going through my National Assistance punishment, you couldn't afford to have a girlfriend. There's only two women in the film – the one who runs the teashop I tried to cast as near to Margaret Thatcher as I could.

"When they come into the cake shop she says, 'If you don't leave I'll call the police.' Thatcher seems to believe that everything that goes wrong in this country can be dealt with by the police. We'll soon have operations on brain tumours being done by the police in this country. If the police can't solve a problem, it's better not being solved at all."

"Richard E Grant is as straight as they come. Half a junior aspirin and he'd be on his back"

A product of working-class, secondary modern education, Robinson drifted to London's squat culture in the '60s, with ambitions to be either a writer or an actor.

"They used to call me The Bard because I couldn't fucking write. It's difficult – the fantasy about rushing to the typewriter and dashing off the brilliant novel doesn't happen. I used to go at it all day, I destroyed most of it. The one or two pieces I kept are unreadable rubbish."

Originally completed as a novel in 1970, *Withnail And I* has an edge to it, the two pharmaceutically addled protagonists experiencing a fear and isolation that recalls the comic mania of Hunter S Thompson.

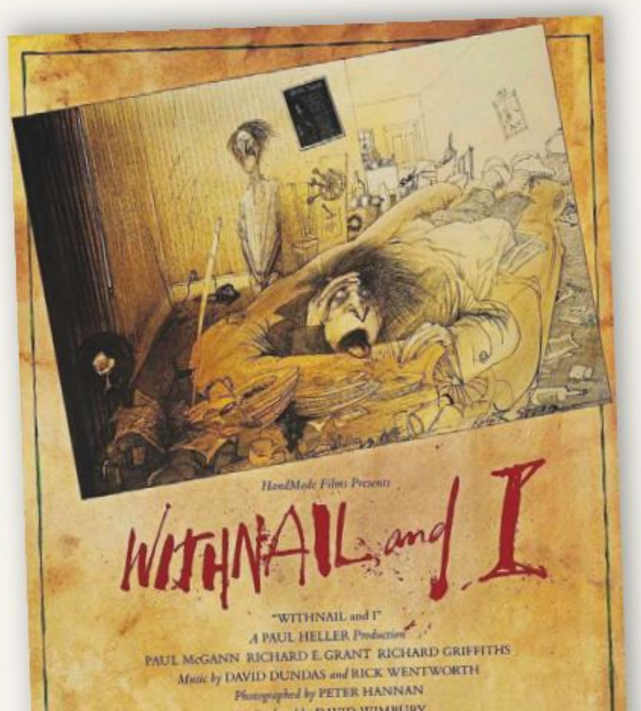
"I can see where *Withnail* crosses over with *Fear And Loathing*, but the thing is, *Withnail* was written before it. The difference between the two is that his characters are awash with drugs, mine are desperate for them."

Circulated as a photostat among friends (a sort of pre-punk fanzine novel), *Withnail* came to the attention of a wealthy young man called Mody [Moderick] Schreiber, who funded its transfer to film script. Before it finally got made, Robinson was commissioned to script the drab, trudging *Killing Fields*.

"I was distressed when all the comedy was taken out, it was a lot funnier than what you see on the screen. I like writing comedy, it's so important. Which is why I wanted to direct."

Enter Handmade Films and George Harrison (a man with an eye for the best in British movies). An old hero?

"Of course, the movie is set in the Indian summer of The Beatles. I can remember seeing them in '65 and '66 in Bond Street. They were walking along in long black coats. It was like seeing The Dillinger Gang or Jesse James Mob, these were powerful heroes. I got on that 74 bus back up to Camden Town, to tell everyone. The bloody Beatles in Bond Street! John Lennon walked right past me. I couldn't believe it."



MURRAY CLOSE / GETTY

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Determined but thrown in at the deep end, on his directorial debut Robinson relied on team effort to bring the story to life.

"It was like building the Titanic. We'd sit up and talk and reread it all night. We learned from each other. I knew nothing about directing but I had acted, so we worked on getting the performances right. Richard E Grant, who plays Withnail, is as straight as they come – half a junior aspirin and he'd be on his back.

"So one night I kept him up and force-fed him vodka, got him completely demolished. The next morning, we dragged him to rehearsals, pissed as a fart. From then on, he had a chemical memory of what it was like to be wasted. Once we got that we were off, we were flying."

Refreshingly, the movie presents drugs not as a great moral danger or social evil but as a fact of life.

"Heroin's a deadly, dangerous drug – I've seen far too many die over the years because of it. I couldn't smoke a joint nowadays if you paid me, I'd get paranoid and run a mile. But there is a time in your life where it's right to do that – you're free and happy and all the rest of it.

"People aren't meant to come out of the movie saying I'll never take another drug in my life. That's what's wrong with the cinema today, everything has to mean something – I just wanted to get a few laughs out of the audience."

But what makes *Withnail* great rather than just knockabout comedy are the universal themes, imbued with Robinson's love of a rich English literary heritage.

"I love Shakespeare, Dickens, even Orwell. I want to bring literacy back to the cinema, I'm fed up with the grunts. What pleased me about *Withnail*, when it opened in the States, 17- or 18-year-old kids were laughing with it, getting involved. I'm not a big Hendrix fan, but I knew that it was right that the guys go out and come back to the sound of Hendrix. The kids love it, they're acting out Hendrix guitar-playing in the aisles."

He's unsure how the movie will be received in this country. He need have no such worries; the Camden depicted in 1969 is much the same as the climate in 1979 or 1989.

"Well, nothing fucking changes, that's England; in that sense it's a contemporary film. I only write because I'm pissed off. *Withnail* is the best political thing I've written, but it's implicit even there – it's in the smelly socks, the mildew, the rain, always the rain. That's an encapsulation of England as I see it.

"It is a hangover movie, but the difference between then and now is that you couldn't base *Withnail* in the '80s, you couldn't have someone saying fuck all this decayed shit, I'm going on myself. You couldn't do it, because all those people are out there and they are completely fucked, they're working for that woman.

"Take the guy I based the dealer on. In 1971, we all really thought he was going to OD on smack – he's now a whizz-kid property dealer. Which is pretty weird."

Gavin Martin

Nothing Dü-ing: (l–r) Greg Norton, Grant Hart and Bob Mould go their separate ways

"Philosophical differences"

NME FEB 20 Burning brightly but briefly, Hüsker Dü have split.

HÜSKER DÜ HAVE definitely split up – confirming our story last week that there was a crisis in the band's camp.

In a terse statement the band's manager, Linda Clark, said: "Due to philosophical and creative differences the members of Hüsker Dü have decided to go their separate ways. There is no further information at this moment."

Sources close to the band, however, put the split down to different reasons, namely drummer Grant Hart's personal problems, which are believed to be heroin related.

It's known that the two other members of the Minneapolis trio, Bob Mould and Greg Norton, gave an ultimatum to Hart telling him that he had to sort out his personal problems if the band were to continue.

Obviously, the drummer was unable, or unwilling, to change his habits and lifestyle. The crisis finally came to a head when Hüsker Dü had to cancel a US tour in progress owing to Hart's unreliability.

The band's Minneapolis office, which they've rented for the last seven years, was also closed last week, and according to WEA, the band's label, it's too early to say whether any individual projects are in the pipeline.

Hüsker Dü formed in late '78, playing the high-velocity hardcore that had become popular in America following the punk upheavals in Britain. Appropriately, their first album was called *Land Speed Record*. A sonic smear shot through with Mould's vitriolic guitaring, it pre-dated the rise of thrash metal by some seven years.

"Unreasonable"

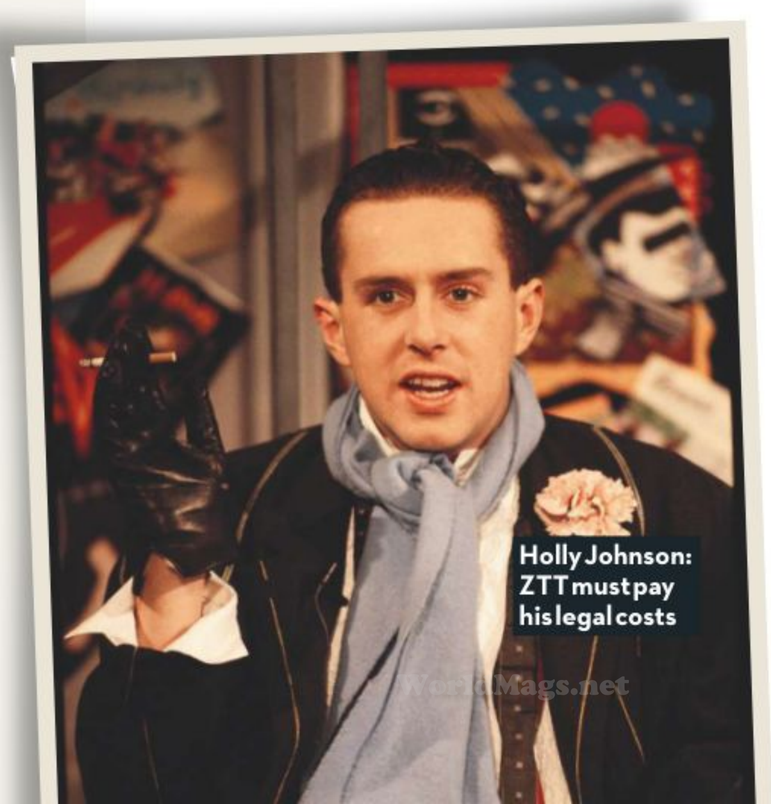
NME MAR 12 ZTT cannot hold Holly Johnson to a "nonsensical" contract.

ZANG TUUM TUMB Records has to foot the estimated £500,000 bill for their unsuccessful legal action to stop Holly Johnson pursuing a solo career, the High Court ruled last week.

Andrew Bateson QC, counsel for ZTT and publishers Perfect Songs, asked Mr Justice Whitford not to make any order for costs. He claimed that they had soared after the introduction of thousands of unnecessary documents and unduly lengthy cross-examination of witnesses by counsel for the former singer with Frankie Goes To Hollywood. But the judge, who last month ruled that Johnson's contract with ZTT was "nonsensical" and "unreasonable", rejected the request.

He agreed that the hearing last month was "unnecessarily protracted", but ruled that ZTT should pay the costs because Johnson had successfully defended himself against their attempt to force him to honour his contract.

Johnson is now pursuing a solo career with MCA Records.



Holly Johnson: ZTT must pay his legal costs

LISA HAUN / GETTY; LYNN GOLDSMITH / GETTY

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Detecting fascism: Neil Tennant (left, with fellow Pet Shop Boy Chris Lowe)

"A witch hunt"

MM FEB 20 Musicians campaign against Clause 28.

PET SHOP BOYS and Billy Bragg are among musicians campaigning against Clause 28 in the Local Government Bill – the clause that prohibits local authorities from "promoting homosexuality".

They signed an advertisement which appeared in *The Independent* on February 1. And Neil Tennant later issued a statement: "Although a Labour voter, I have always felt that anyone accusing Mrs Thatcher's Government of fascism was being hysterical in the face of *laissez-faire* economics.

"I have changed my mind. In instigating a witch hunt against homosexuals with the insertion of Clause 28 into the Local Government Bill, the Thatcher government is focusing on an 'internal enemy', to deflect increasing opposition to its policy. This is a classic fascist tactic. If it succeeds, witch hunts against other 'internal enemies' will be instigated.

"Homosexuals will not be the only victims of Clause 28. The other implications of the clause in the realm of censorship were eloquently pointed out by Ian McKellen in his televised speech at the Laurence Olivier Awards.

"That a clause promoting prejudice against and persecution of homosexuals and censorship of the arts should be so wholeheartedly supported by the Conservative party is indicative of an increasing characteristic of Mrs Thatcher's government: fascism."

Steve Davis: longtime Magma fan

"I thought I'd take the risk"

MM JAN 2 Top potter Steve Davis turns prog promoter.

WORLD SNOOKER CHAMPION Steve Davis is breaking into the music business – as a promoter.

Davis has set up his own company – aptly called Interesting Promotions – and has struck a deal with his favourite band, French jazz-rock outfit Magma, who first came to prominence in the '70s but have been little heard of since in this country. Davis brings Magma back to England for three gigs at the London Bloomsbury Theatre on January 14, 15 and 16. Tickets are priced £6 from the box office.

Davis said this week that his primary reason for the new venture was his own wish to see Magma live: "The only stipulation I made was that the dates had to take place on nights when I was free to see them myself."

He added: "I first saw Magma at Chalk Farm in 1974 when I went along to see the support band, Isotope. From then on I was a Magma fan and a collector. I wanted to get everything of theirs that was available, so I put an advert in *Record Collector* and got back a letter from Duncan Lane, who's the biggest Magma fan in England. He informed me of all the Magma stuff I didn't have.

"I found out that they were still playing and going strong, but that they had no plans for coming to London. Nobody was prepared to take the risk of putting them on in London because there are 12 or 13 in the band. It's not like bringing an American artist over and hiring a backing band in England. Also, they're not in vogue.

"I thought I'd take the risk and hopefully get people to come along out of interest, as well as the people who used to see them in the '70s. Hopefully they'll get a few fans.

"The thing about Magma was that they had no real idea of who I was. I thought that was great, quite funny."

Davis intends to bring Magma back to Britain in the summer. He's also considering promoting "a couple of the more obscure soul singers that don't have the chance to perform outside their local area".

"It's totally cool"

NME MAR 5 What's with all the smiley faces? *NME* sets out to investigate...

TIME WAS, WHEN dinosaurs walked the earth, the peace & love generation beamed their goodwill at the world with millions and millions and millions of sunny yellow smiley badges. The merry little grin was unavoidable. Wherever you went, the jolly little black eyes were watching you.

Then one day they woke up, and found that fashion had ordered the replacement of the smile with the snarl. Out of work in their uncountable hordes, they went underground for a long season. First sign they were back was a drop of blood slashing down across the cheery yellow visage. Back, but bruised, the *Watchmen* logo put us all on alert.

And then we began to see it everywhere. Nick Trulocke's Discotheque invites, round plastic discs with half a grin and one eye – modern, ironic, tipping the wink to the wise. Every Saturday 10pm to 3am, 157 Charing Cross Road.

We noticed the Bomb The Bass logo, and its similarity to the Watchmen warning sign. Was this the Voice Of The Underground, speaking in one voice? Or just another artistic rip-off? Tim Simenon of the band told Thrills that it wasn't intended as the latter and went on to say: "I love *Watchmen*. It's totally cool, and we just thought it'd be a good idea to incorporate the logo because it's so great."

Tim's version is dopier, jacked out – the blood's been replaced by a splash of red jelly.

Since *NME* has helped clear up the little matter of permission, a full working relationship has been struck up between the record label, Rhythm King, and the comic artist responsible for the *Watchmen* version, Dave Gibbons.

Bomb The Bass are planning to wear *Watchmen* T-shirts on all their TV appearances, and Gibbons is at this very minute designing the record sleeve for the next Bomb The Bass single, which will incorporate a cartoon strip about Simenon.

What do the Yellow Hordes think of all this? Fixed grins all round.

MICHAEL PUTLAND / GETTY; BOB THOMAS / GETTY

"In excess of £100,000"

NME MAR 16 The hidden history of "99 Red Balloons", Nena's global hit.

SONGWRITER KEVIN McALEA has won a four-year battle for royalties for Nena's worldwide No 1, "99 Red Balloons".

McAlea now stands to receive in excess of £100,000 following a High Court ruling last week. Deputy Judge Paul Baker QC said he was satisfied that McAlea and his agents Handle Music were entitled to the copyright, and dismissed claims by CBS that the songwriter handed over his rights when Nena recorded the track.

McAlea became involved when he was commissioned to write an English version of the German group's hit. The judge said that after examining the original German song he was satisfied that McAlea's version was "an entirely original work", not just a translation. There will now be an inquiry into how much money the record made in order to assess how much McAlea and Handle should eventually receive, and the songwriter's lawyers are estimating it will easily reach six figures.

"My clients don't sing jingles"

NME MAR 5 Beatles force Nike to drop recording from TV ads.

THE BEATLES HAVE won their battle to stop sportswear firm Nike using the original recording of "Revolution" in television commercials.

The former members of the group filed a $15 million law suit in New York last July, but Nike finally announced last week that the highly successful commercials, featuring John McEnroe and basketball superstar Michael Jordan, were being withdrawn.

"My clients don't sing jingles or endorse commercial products," said Beatles lawyer Leonard Marks, following the Nike withdrawal. It is not known, however, if The Beatles received any out-of-court financial settlement over their action.

Nike started to use "Revolution" in their ads after buying the rights to the song from Michael Jackson, who in turn had outbid Paul McCartney for the bulk of The Beatles' back catalogue.

THE MATERIAL WORLD OF THE SUGARCUBES

May 2, 1988: The Sugarcubes' Björk and Einar in Amsterdam

NME FEB 20

The things Björk and co would put down on a birthday list.

Music
SH Draumur
Juanito Valderrama
Nino Rota
Iggy Pop
Swans
Dion & The Belmonts
JS Bach
Crass
Martirio
Francisco Ullua
Charlie Mingus
Abdel Aziz El Mubarak
Johnny Triumph
The Sorrows
Pere Ubu
Ella Fitzgerald
(This selection is done by the merits of the photogenity of the artists.)

Reading matter
The collective Sugarcubes library, Thorsgata 15, 101 Reykjavik Iceland.

TV
Fréttir
Veóurfréttir
The Equalizer
Blind Date
Besti Vinur Ljóósins
Annir Og Appelsinur
Sjónvarp Næstu Viku
Why Am Me Mice
International boxing
The Bugs Bunny Show

Films
Hrafninn Flygur
Á Hjara Veraldar
The Other
Pardon Me But You've Got Your Teeth In My Neck
The Tenant
The Tin Drum
Holiday Of Monsieur Hulot
The Last Emperor
Onibaba
Ran
Derzu Urzula
79 Af Stööinni
Fanny Och Alexander
Salka Valka

Drinks
Kaffi
Bloody Mary
Absinthe
Milk
Beachcomber
Cognac
Drambuie
Dry oporto
Dom
Mustard mixed with apple vinegar.
Spanish brandy
Bló
Maracuaja juice
Boiled water
Anis Pastiche 54
Ouzo
Ballantine's 21 years old
Mescal
Ricard
Brennivín
Tequila

TV personalities
Árni
Silla

Radio personalities
Halli Thorstseméérost

Hates
Fast women
Loose cars

Loves
Mountains

Favourite actress
Dustin Hoffman
Linda Gray (when drunk)
Oliver Reed

Favourite actor
Divine
The Elephant in *Elephant Man.*
Antonin Artaud

Painters
Frida Kahlo
Tisnikar
Húbert Nói
André Breton
EA Melax
José Guadalupe Posada

Poets
Lord Eldon
Sjón
HX Jóhamar
Vítězslav Nezval
B Konrad
Dagur S Thorodssen
Ragnheiour Ofeigsdóttir

Perfume
Kölnische Wasser No 4711
Success oil

Fruits
Orange
Potato
Dolly Parton
Another orange

Cars
Red Volga
Trabant station
Sigmund Special
(All these quite indescribable, do your own research.)

Animals
Smuff, our leader.

Favourite question
Favourite question.

Sex symbol
Michael Jackson, before and after science.

Earliest memory
The twinkle in our father's eye.

Places
Oklahoma, the movie.

Dance
Drip Drop Dead

Footballer
Julio Iglesias

Night-time hobbies
Baseball.
Emotional crisis.
Daydreaming.

What would you do if you ruled the world?
Go to Sweden and buy a submarine.

FRANS SCHELLEKENS / GETTY; KEVIN WINTER / GETTY

1988

JANUARY – MARCH

"I like songwriting, but I don't like singing them myself": Shane MacGowan on stage with The Pogues

ALAMY

WorldMags.net

“Trying to look ahead.”

Post “Fairytale...”, THE POGUES hit the USA, with Joe Strummer along for the ride. Here, Shane MacGowan’s band reveal as much about their singer’s rueful nature as the man himself. “You can’t talk about life without talking about death,” Jem Finer observes.

— NME JANUARY 2 —

Tramping out the vintage

THE SIGHT MAKES hours of discomfort and on-the-road travel-lag partially bearable. A wide grassy plain bordered on either side by Californian mountains and the Pacific Ocean. A vision of the good earth.

“It’s the promised land.”

“Yeah, can you imagine what it was like when there was nothing here and people came to it on horseback?”

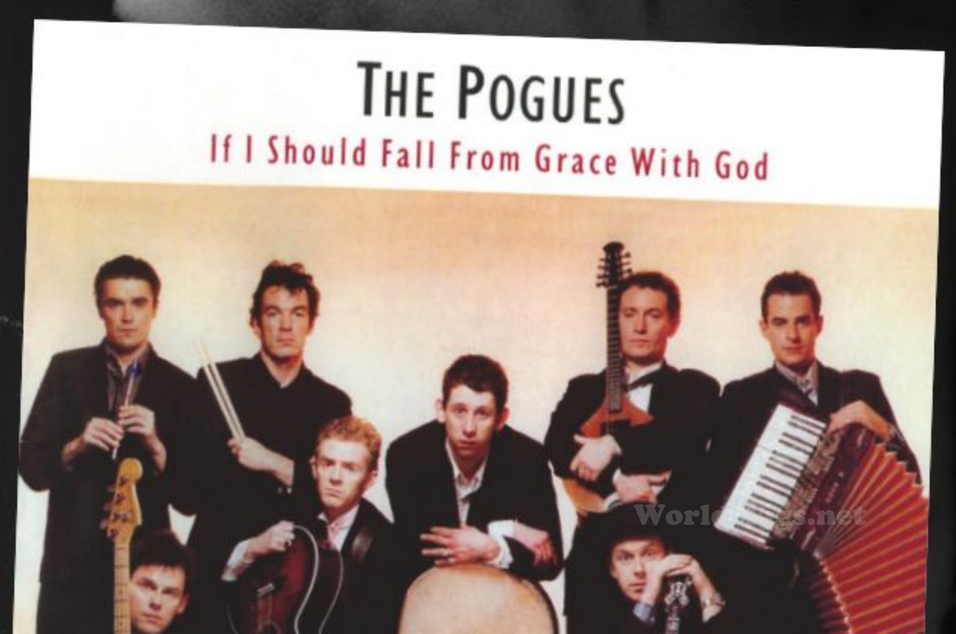
“Awesome.”

Jem Finer, banjo player and Shane MacGowan’s sometime writing partner, often seems an island of sanity amidst the mayhem. He’s thinking of another time and place. Surveying the land, and then the motley bunch sloshing booze and blowing combustibles around the cramped minivan, he deadpans, “We’re a bit like the family in *Grapes Of Wrath*. Coming here from afar and not really knowing what we’re going to find.”

Entitled “The Brother Wouldn’t Look At An Egg Tour”, a line taken from Irish literary genius Flann O’Brien, The Pogues’ three-week jaunt around America is winding to a close with three dates in California. Their schedule has been hectic, any days off spent on the long haul. Indeed, for the last two years The Pogues, one of the biggest groups and most potent cultural forces in these islands, have been forced to tour with energy-sapping regularity. In a protracted legal dispute with their record company, it was the only way for an outfit with eight members (sometimes augmented to 12) to stay solvent.

That the road has taken its toll on brain, body and soul is evidenced by the absences of guitarist Phil Chevron, his place taken for the tour by old punk showman and all-round trouper Joe Strummer. Shane MacGowan, shambolic stumbling man and dental disaster area at the centre of The Pogues, had delayed the journey when he decided two-and-a-half hours without a drink would be intolerable and made a rambling beeline for the liquor store. Now Shane has spotted the journalist. “Fuck off, what are you Fucking cunts doing on the fucking bus anyway, tssscccch.” Nice to see you too, Shane.

Talk on the bus is of foreign travel and exotic musics and ranges from Miles Davis’ »



jazz to Puccini's arias ("Opera has taken quite a hold on The Pogies," confides squeezebox man James Fearnley). Travel, Shane MacGowan's poetic language and telling insights, a raw delight in regional accents and colloquialisms, a new fluency of playing that complements rather than smooths over their essential rawness – these have all been decisive factors in bringing The Pogues to their present pitch.

The duet ballad-battle of "Fairytale Of New York" is proof of their continued ascendance, while the live show mixes a cornucopia of international musics with an emotional range stretching from gangland/party exuberance to heart-rending poignancy. And the Americans love it.

The rock star

AT ONE OF the clubs The Pogues play, there's a large roof hatch. "That's probably where Joe Strummer will land his helicopter," jokes Spider. It was manager Frank Murray, always a man with an eye for the clever stroke, who decided to ask Strummer to take Phil Chevron's slot when the latter's ulcer played up. Trying to find a way out of acting and back into "rocking" (he'd just completed *Walker* with Alex Cox in Nicaragua), Strummer leapt at the chance.

Whether he be serenading and calming the audience during "A Pair Of Brown Eyes" or doing his own star turn with "I Fought The Law" and "London Calling", Strummer fits like a dream, giving a new dimension and added warmth to the band.

Backstage, Shane slugs a bottle of Christian Brothers port. Someone asks him about Joe Strummer's role in the band: "What? Joe? Oh yeah, Joe Strummer. He's helping out at the minute, I think. I don't really know what's going on. I hate them all anyway. Not really, I'm only joking."

There does seem to be an unspoken tension between Shane and Strummer. The former Clash man acknowledges this. "You're not the first person to mention it and I think you're right. I want to clear things with Shane; if I come aboard, I don't want to elbow in on anything. I just want to do justice to his songs.

"I've known him and Spider vaguely for years. They were just two crazies from the punk days. Shane might still be a crazy but he's also a genius, you can put his work beside anyone you care to mention – Lou Reed, Brendan Behan, whoever."

You look as if you're enjoying it far more than The Clash.

"It's 10 times faster than punk – I've got callouses on my fingers I've never had before, they feel like blocks of wood. The frenzy in the crowd is similar to the early days of punk, too. People jumping on stage naked. In Vancouver, this girl jumped on stage and started mauling him. Shane, tell him about the girl who tried to do you on stage."

The laughing boy cringes: "Don't go telling him about that for God's sake, tsssccchtssch."

The magpie

HAVING COME THROUGH the cold rains and snow of North America, Jem Finer takes a couple of hours by the sun trap at the hotel pool to reflect on the group's progress. A computer graduate from Oxford, he arrived in London's Euston squat area at the end of the '70s, where he first met Shane MacGowan: "I knew him for about six months before I knew he had anything to do with music. One night he said he was going off to a gig. I thought he was going to watch, until somebody told me he sang with The Nips."

Jem feels that the discipline of teaching himself, encouraged in university, came in useful as he began to learn to play instruments after forming Pogue Mahone. It wasn't until two years ago, with "Fairytale Of New York", that he began writing with Shane (on the new album they've co-written four songs).

"I don't know how he does it. I know that an awful lot of work goes into it, refining the lyrics and the melody. I had written two songs complete with tunes; one had a good tune and crap lyrics, the other had the idea for 'Fairytale…' but the tune was poxy. I gave them both to Shane and he gave it a Broadway melody, and there it was."

It's not the sort of trivia and jollity usually heard on a festive record.

"No, but it's true to life – more people argue, get divorced and commit suicide at Christmas than at any other time of the year."

When The Pogues started out, they were hallmarked by a raw passion drawn directly from the Celtic tradition. Doesn't England have anything to compare to the traditions of Scotland and Ireland?

"Not to that extent; the English are not the most passionate race in the world. They have a long history of dispensing misery, maybe that's where the other people get their spirit from; it's not so much born as forced into their music and writing. But I wouldn't like to make any sweeping statement, there's more to our music than just Irishry."

If I Should Fall From Grace With God, the group's third album, eloquently bears out Finer's claim. It uses added horns, bazouki and mandolin to give suitable flavouring to the eastern modal styling of "Turkish Song Of The Damned" and the noir-jazz instrumental "Metropolis", and there's a Spanish spice added to "Fiesta", MacGowan and Finer's little tribute to a seven-day party that kept them awake during the making of Alex Cox's other film from 1987, *Straight To Hell*.

Naturally, the strains and logistics of putting such a large band on the road causes many arguments: "Sometimes we all start screaming at each other. But at the end of the day everyone says sorry. Unless someone is being particularly stupid or outrageous, in which case we take him into the corner and kick his teeth in."

It takes a worried man to sing a worried song

"THERE'S A SERIES OF sculptures in Florence called *The Prisoners* and they're by Michelangelo. Everything is unfinished, they're just blocks of stone with limbs sticking out, half a face, it's all just hacked away at. I think he might have died before they were finished. Shane's a bit like one of them. He comes round to rehearsals or goes round to Jem's house to start a song. We'll all stand around him and he's effing and snarling because he gets all the chords wrong and he's left all his pieces of paper at home. But he still writes the bleeding things, so we have to do something with them." *James Fearnley*

"THERE IS A lot of death in his songs. But there's also a lot about love and hate and happiness and sadness, because what they are, his songs, they're impressions of life. They're not bullshit songs, they're completely honest.

"His vision of the world is about life, but you can't talk about life without talking about death. I think he's obsessed with life and what it means for different people in different places at different times." *Jem Finer*

MACGOWAN'S ARMS STILL bear the cigarette burns of a punk past. He is the direct inverse of your usual pop star. As Shane approaches his moment of greatest fame, he seems to be becoming increasingly bedraggled, sinking ever further into the mire. He looks more and more like one of the underclass victims described in a song like "The Old Main Drag", and sometimes sad and kind of ghostly.

It's easy but unwise to dwell on his drinking as his way of battling with his demons or trying to quell or submerge a raging muse. He'll certainly have none of it. Could you write and perform better if you didn't drink?

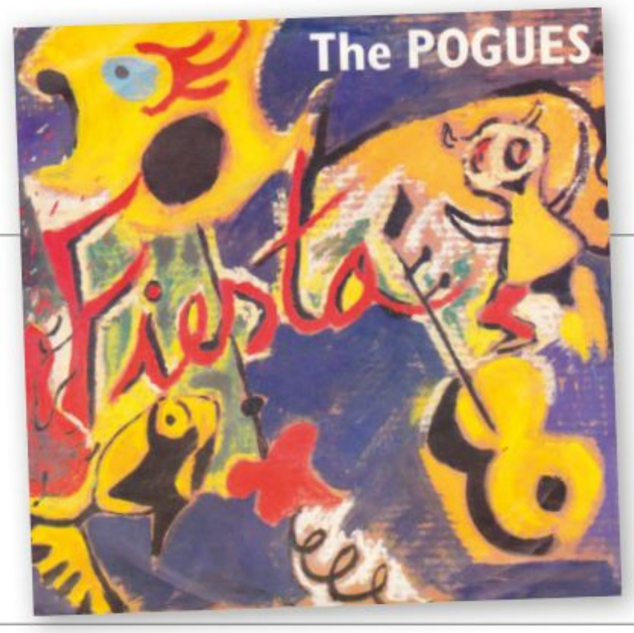
"I don't think the two things are connected in any way whatsoever."

Using a mixture of historical perspectives, torrid romanticism, third-person narratives and old Irish balladry, MacGowan is a writer with few antecedents in popular music. Perhaps the greatest thing about his grasp and the vision his songs unfold is that they're as pertinent to your parents, maybe even your grandparents, as to yourself.

"That's true. I've generally found that to be true – most of the older generation are into what I'm doing now, which is good. I've done all the teenage-angst

Jem Finer (second left) watches his co-writer fall from grace in Paris, March 1988

ULLSTEIN BILD / GETTY



shit. I'm not interested any more. There's no difference between old or young people, middle-aged people, black people or white people."

Van Morrison confronting the horror of decay in *TB Sheets* or utilising Celtic death imagery in *Astral Weeks* is a discernible influence, but these days, although he's similarly evasive and unwilling to talk about this work in any depth, he has not time for the old master.

"He's been hanging out with Bono too much," is the blunt dismissal.

Is introspection bad for a writer?

"Yeah, if you're looking inwards you can't see what's going on."

Do you reassess your songs when you sing them?

"I find the whole thing an embarrassment, really. I shouldn't really be telling you this. Some songs are easier to sing than others and some songs sound really stupid if you sing them badly.

"It's easier to sing other people's songs; you don't have to think about them so much. Sometimes when you sing your own songs you can't help thinking, 'It shouldn't go like that.'"

You're embarrassed by your voice?

"Yeah, I don't like singing. I like songwriting, but I don't like singing them myself. But obviously, the way it is, I have to do both. Sometimes I like singing, but not all the time."

Was having Joe Strummer as another frontman a boon, then?

"Whaaa? Another frontman. Listen, right, there's never been any frontman in this group. He was the first real frontman we ever had. Of course, he was great."

What has been the biggest thrill The Pogues have given you?

"Having two No 1s in Ireland this year, because it's a better country than England and a vindication of what we're doing. Going on *Top Of The Pops* with The Dubliners was good, not because it was *Top Of The Pops* but because it was The Dubliners."

What's the biggest piss-off about being in the band?

"Not being rich yet."

In Ireland you're a star – do you enjoy the adulation?

"You don't get adulation in Ireland. Irish people aren't like that. They give you admiration and respect, which is cool."

But in London you get hassled?

"To a certain extent, yeah."

Do you get nervous or jittery when you're on stage?

"I do nowadays; I didn't before."

Because of increasing popularity?

"Yeah, I suppose so."

"What do you think about on stage?

"The next line. Of words, tsscch tsssscccch."

"Birmingham Six" tells the story of one of the most blatant legal stitch-ups of modern times. A departure?

"Yeah, because it's about specific people who are still in the nick. And about a situation which is still going on which is obscene. I didn't feel anything except what I wrote in the song. If it offends the people in the song or their family, then I'd be worried. If it offends anyone else, I couldn't give a shit."

The album's title track, "If I Should Fall From Grace With God", comes from your time in Spain…

"It wasn't considered good enough for the *Straight To Hell* movie, but that doesn't worry me. We were out in the Andalusian desert in Spain, which is land soaked in blood from people that fought to keep the place where they were born. There's a feeling that just hits you, like when you go to where the plague victims are buried in Ireland. It just came to me like that, automatic writing, like 'Rainy Night In Soho', just there in five minutes."

How does one fall from grace with God?

"I don't know – you fucking know when it happens, but I don't know how it happens."

"Bottle Of Smoke" is a rare slice of colloquial bookie's language, a celebration of the small-time gambler who hits the big one: "*Twenty-fucking-five to one… I bet on a horse called the Bottle Of Smoke.*" Fearnley's accordion keeps the momentum as the horse rounds the track and Spider interjects with several hearty calls of "*Come on, you bastard*". Pure Genius.

"I don't gamble much now. I used to, but I'm never in the country, so I don't get a chance. I made the whole thing up. 'Bottle Of Smoke' is the sort of weird impossible name that always wins a race."

A broad romantic streak tempered by the shit of the world is the sensibility unearthed in the three gorgeous ballads with which the record closes.

"Lullaby Of London": "It's about a guy coming home pissed and telling his kid that everything is alright, go asleep. He's hoping the kid won't have to go through the shit that he went through. I don't know what sort of shit; the shit people have to go through every day. It's a kind of hopeful song."

"Sit Down By The Fire": "That's about the old ghost stories people used to tell you in Ireland before you went to bed. They used to tell you some horrific stories to prepare you for the horrors of the world ahead.

"I think it's a good idea. If I had children I wouldn't do that, I'd tell them straight. But in those days people didn't say things straight, language was more poetic."

"Broad Majestic Shannon": "It's just about someone going back to Ireland and talking to a childhood sweetheart, relative or a good friend. Everything has gone or is going and he's just saying what they are, that they've all gone now. It's about trying to look ahead."

> "Most of the older generation are into what I'm doing now"

And the band played on

THE SHOW NOW is irrefutable, hallmarked by a series of MacGowan classics and songs they've made their own, like "Dirty Old Town" and "Maggie May". Most satisfying is the way they've grown from their raw, sparing beginnings. When they started out, London was synonymous with the posey foppery of the Blitz/Spandau axis. In 1987, if London's island state is represented by any one outfit it must be this splendidly wayward mob.

In San Juan Capistrano it's a clear victory, replicating the reaction of crowds all over the world. The band play on the tables, Bob Dylan's son Jesse captures the whole thing on video camera, and someone finds and returns a severely poleaxed scribe's wallet. Alternatively bemused, tousling his hair, swapping drinks, chat and cigarettes with the audience, Shane is at the centre of the maelstrom – a puzzled, troubled figure beneath it all.

Elsewhere, Dave Hidalgo, Los Lobos' soft-voiced frontman, grabs his hand. "I sure like to sing like you, Shane MacGowan, that's a really good voice."

In the dressing room, Spider and Strummer bash out a nifty acoustic version of "La Bamba" and Shane teaches a girl how to play the tin whistle. Frank Murray recalls a record company boss who vetoed a deal the band were about to sign for £250,000 a few months ago. "Could you believe he didn't think The Pogues were going to be popular?" We both shake our heads in amazement.

Bass player Daryl and Spider profess a liking for Orange marching bands, making The Pogues possibly the only group in the world into both opera from Catholic Italy and marching bands from Protestant Northern Ireland.

Daryl points at Shane. The singer is slumped over a guitar, cheap costume bracelet on his wrist and a Mexican art snake hanging from his ear. There's a few fans gathered round and they sing along as he bashes out a tune, Van Morrison's "Gloria", then Bruce Springsteen's "Born In The USA".

"One of the moments I'll always remember is when we came on stage at Madison Square supporting U2," says the bassist. "The first five rows were the people with the 100-dollars suits. It was the cream of the city, with their diamonds, expensive suits and ballgowns. These people were used to real stadium bands – the look on their faces when he took to the stage, looked around, shrugged his shoulders and grunted something into the mic is one I'll cherish."

"As long as we can maintain that sham amateurism we'll be OK; if we ever lost it and started to take ourselves as a stadium band, we might as well forget the whole thing."

Five years of chaos for a bunch of rogues with a reluctant, tousled, star-crossed singer and writer. Here's to five more. *Gavin Martin* •

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"Hate makes the world go round"

MORRISSEY returns with a solo album, in which he revisits the landscape of his youth – the early 1970s. Meditating on The Smiths, Britishness, Mrs Thatcher and his own legacy, the singer retains admirable qualities. "Anything that hits against the blaring, bloated Bon Jovi mechanisms, I'll... stand beside."

— MM MARCH 12 —

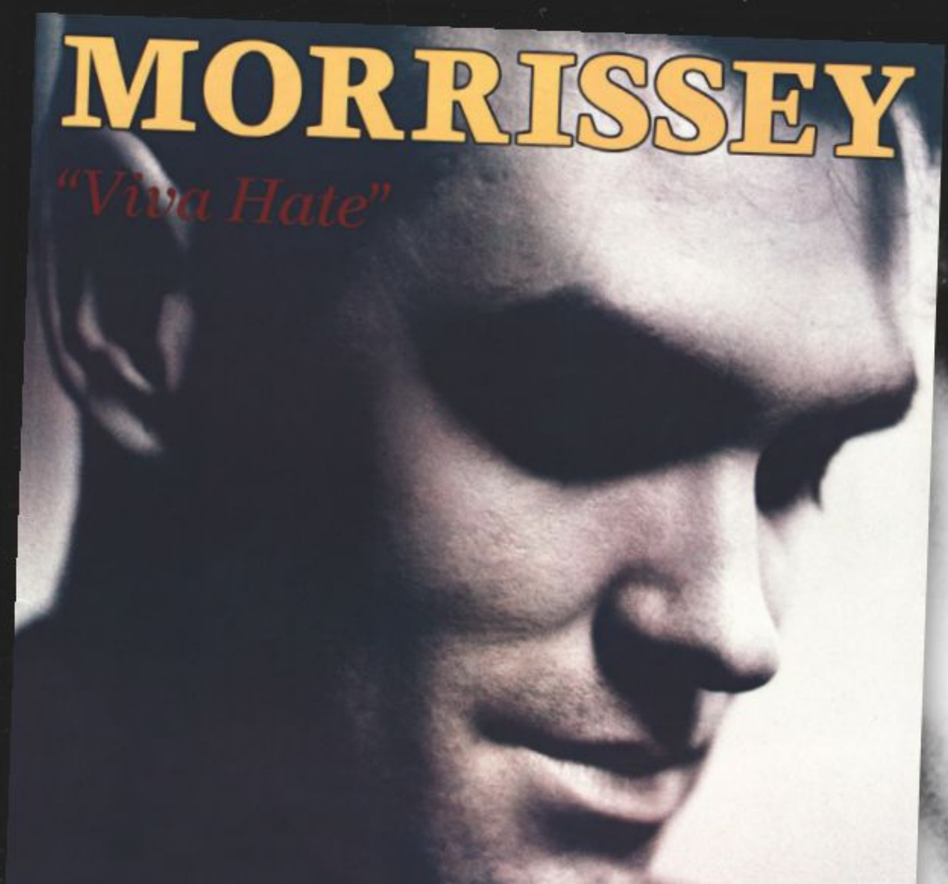
I THINK I'VE MET them all now. For me, there are no more heroes left. And no new ones coming along, by the look of it. It could be that this is a time marked by a dearth of characters, or that the smart people in rock aren't interested in self-projection but in obliterating noise. But really, I think, it's the case that, in this job, you don't have the time to develop obsessions, what with the insane turnover and all the incentives to pluralism.

The heroes you have kind of linger on from a prior period when only a few records passed through your life, when you had time to get fixated, spend days living inside a record. It's a real effort to click back to that frame of mind, which is bad because fanaticism is the true experience of pop – I think of the splendid devotion of all those people who, as soon as they've got hold of the new Cure or New Order or Bunnymen record, immediately set to learning the lyrics by heart then spend days exhaustively interpreting the Tablets From On High, struggling to establish some fit between their experience and what is actually some drunken doggerel cobbled together in a studio off-moment.

Seriously, I approve. I approve the deadly seriousness, the piety, the need for something sacred in your life. However deluded.

It's become a reflex for critics to castigate the readers for being partisan, for being sluggish and single-minded in their choices. We exhort you to disconnect, discard and move on, acquire a certain agility as consumers. But maybe this ideal state of inconstancy we advocate only makes for fitter participants in capitalism. For the one thing that makes rock more than simply an industry, the one thing that transcends the commodity relation, is fidelity, the idea of a relationship. There are voices that you turn to as a friend, and you don't just turn your back on your friends if they go off the rails. You hang around. You give them the time of day. So – in the year in which we've forced the text-centred discipline that is rock writing to »

PAUL RIDER



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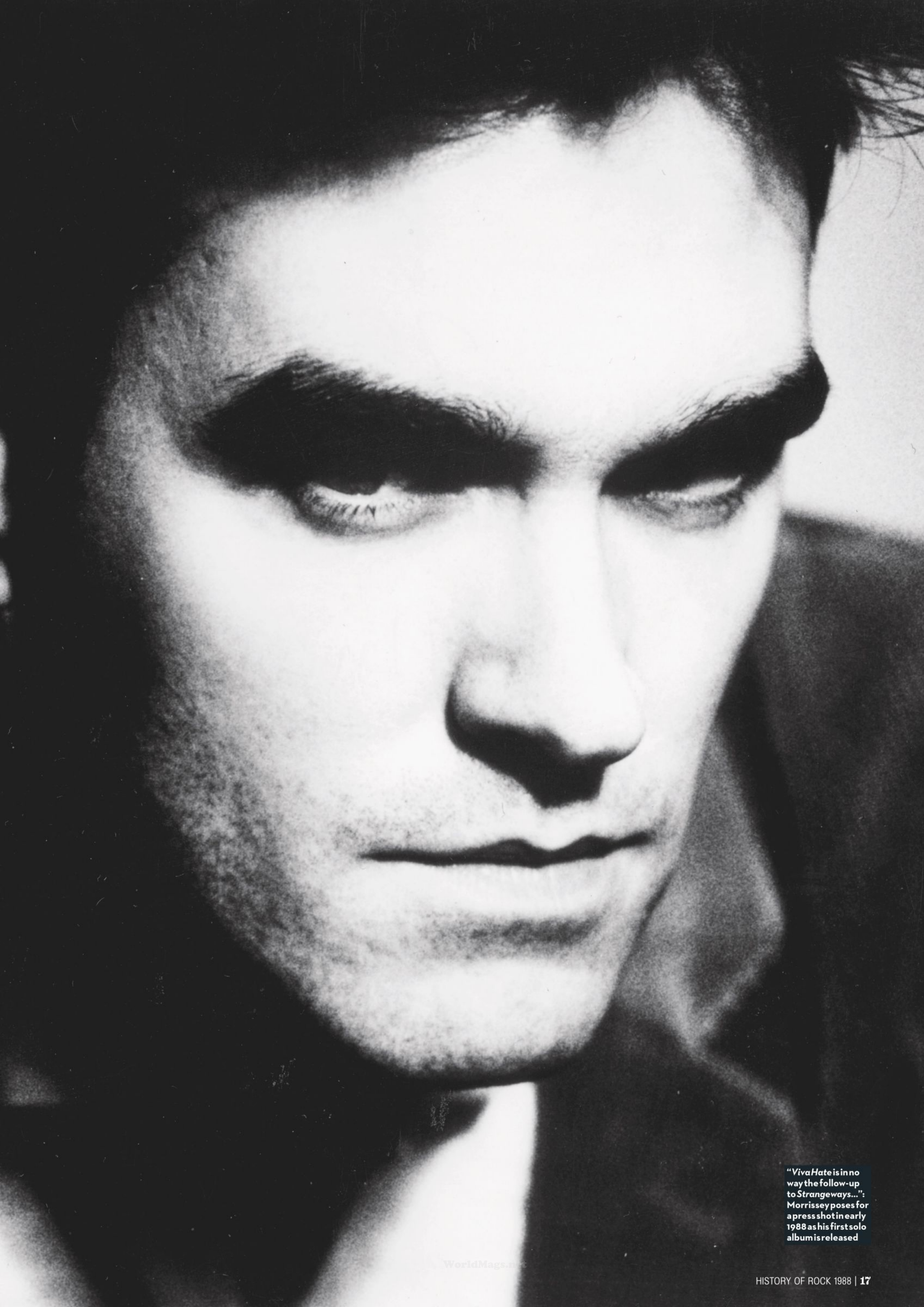

"*Viva Hate* is in no way the follow-up to *Strangeways...*": Morrissey poses for a press shot in early 1988 as his first solo album is released

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incorporate everything it has excluded for so long (the relationship between the star's body and the fan's, the Voice, the materiality of music) – maybe it's time to make criticism grapple with what undoes it, "the uncritical".

Happily, my finally getting to meet Morrissey coincides with the release of one of his great records (they seem to alternate quite evenly with duff ones), so there's no awkward rub between loyalty and the critic's "responsibility".

***VIVA HATE* FEELS** implausibly fresh: the music's breathing again, free of a certain stuffiness and laboriousness that had set in seemingly irreversibly in The Smiths' twilight period. All due respect to Johnny Marr (though the haircuts never get better…) but, like most people "blessed" with skill, there was a tendency to be used by one's versatility rather than use it. Songs were getting written to accommodate guitar conceits, pointless feats and smotheringly unnecessary elaboration. With his producer's rather than instrumentalist's sensibility, Stephen Street is inclined to give a song only what it needs. And I never much cared for the bumptious, muscular side of The Smiths – "What Difference Does It Make", "I Started Something I Couldn't Finish" anyway – so I welcome the spaciness Vini Reilly brings as new guitarist, whether it's the lurid wig-out of "Alsatian Cousin" or the dew-and-moonbeam ECM iridescence of "Late Night, Maudlin Street".

In American teen slang, Vini is "a space" – a dreamer, someone not all there. Hailed by *MM*'s Paul Oldfield as "the missing boy of pop", someone whose resistance takes the form of an absenteeism from life, it strikes me that Reilly's mystical anorexia is unusually suited to Morrissey's neurasthenia, his supine delinquency.

What do you feel about the album? Whenever you have a new record out, you generally opine that it's the best thing you've ever done…
It's quite different for me now – and this might sound absurd – but there really isn't anything to judge it against. Times are very different and my life has moved on, since The Smiths, in very specific ways, and *Viva Hate* is in no way the follow-up to *Strangeways*…. So in a sense I do feel that it is the first record.

Are these changes personal, or artistic…?
Certainly in a personal way, it's entirely changed. All the people that surrounded me 12 months ago have entirely changed, whether it's the group, the people around The Smiths, or Rough Trade. Practically everybody that surrounds me now wasn't there a year ago. And, yes, I'm very pleased with what I find.

Stephen Street is one constant, though…
But working with Stephen as a producer is quite different from writing with him, and even his personality has changed dramatically, within this sphere; he's more relaxed, and more exciting.

What are the respective merits of Marr and Street?
Johnny was very hard, as a musician: he played in a very interesting, aggressive way. Stephen does not. But the gentle side of Stephen is something I find totally precious.

And what about Vini – had you followed his career in Durutti Column?
With a vague interest. Nothing deep. I'd never met him, or saw him play. But I had all his records. When it came to working on the album, it turned out that Stephen had produced Vini's last record. Stephen suggested him, and it was perfect. What I liked was the extremity of his beauty, and the erratic quality. He's also extremely humorous. The whole session was extremely humorous. But Vini's not terribly interested in pop music, whereas Johnny was absolutely steeped in every manifestation of pop.

Why *Viva Hate*? What's the thinking behind the title?
Like many other titles, it simply suggested itself and had to be. It was absolutely how I felt post-Smiths and the way I continue to feel. That's just the way the world is. I find hate omnipresent, and love very difficult to find. Hate makes the world go round.

Does that sadden you? Or do you have a need to hate? Is hate one of the things we do to reinforce the sense of our own identity, our separateness?
I do find people quite hateful, naturally. I think people feel hate very easily, and they need it in their lives, they need to distrust and to criticise.

Is that bad? Natural?
Well, it's just there, really. But then I always thought the human race was very, very overrated – by rock critics generally.

Why did you ask for His Master's Voice to be reactivated as your label?
I was presented with a great choice of defunct labels and designs… things like Decca. I didn't want to be on EMI, and Parlophone seemed like the obvious mod suggestion, which I didn't really want either. His Master's Voice, I thought, had a certain perverted grandiosity and thus spoke to me very directly. I'm the only artist on it.

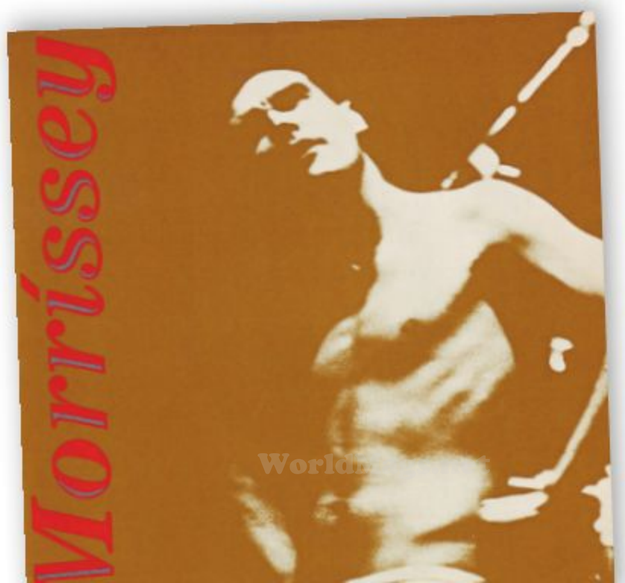
And the last one was Joyce Grenfell, 20 years ago…
Yes. Spot the difference!

That pleases you a great deal?
Yes. I hope other groups don't sign to the HMV label. People like… The Icicle Works. That would be awful! I have hundreds of HMV records in my collection. People like Paul Jones and Johnny Leyton. His most known hits were "Johnny, Remember Me" and "Wild Winds", which got to No 1 and No 2 respectively, but he had a ragbag of semi-failures like 'I'll Cut Your Tail Off' which, for some unknown reason, staggered and died in the lower 40s.

***VIVA HATE*, UNSURPRISINGLY,** returns again and again to the Englishness which obsesses Morrissey. For instance, the probable next single "Everyday Is Like Sunday" pores over the drab details of some benighted seaside resort… *"Hide on the promenade / Scratch out a postcard / How I dearly wish I was not here… trudging slowly over wet sand… win yourself a cheap tray… share some greased tea with me"*… Typically, Morrissey seems to cherish the very constraints and despondency of a now disappearing England, fetishise the lost limits.

What is this love/hate relationship you have with Englishness?
There are very few aspects of Englishness I actually hate. I can see the narrowness, and love to sing about it. But I don't hate Englishness in any way. All aspects of affluence, I find very interesting and entertaining. And it's still, I feel, cliched as it may seem, the sanest country in the world.

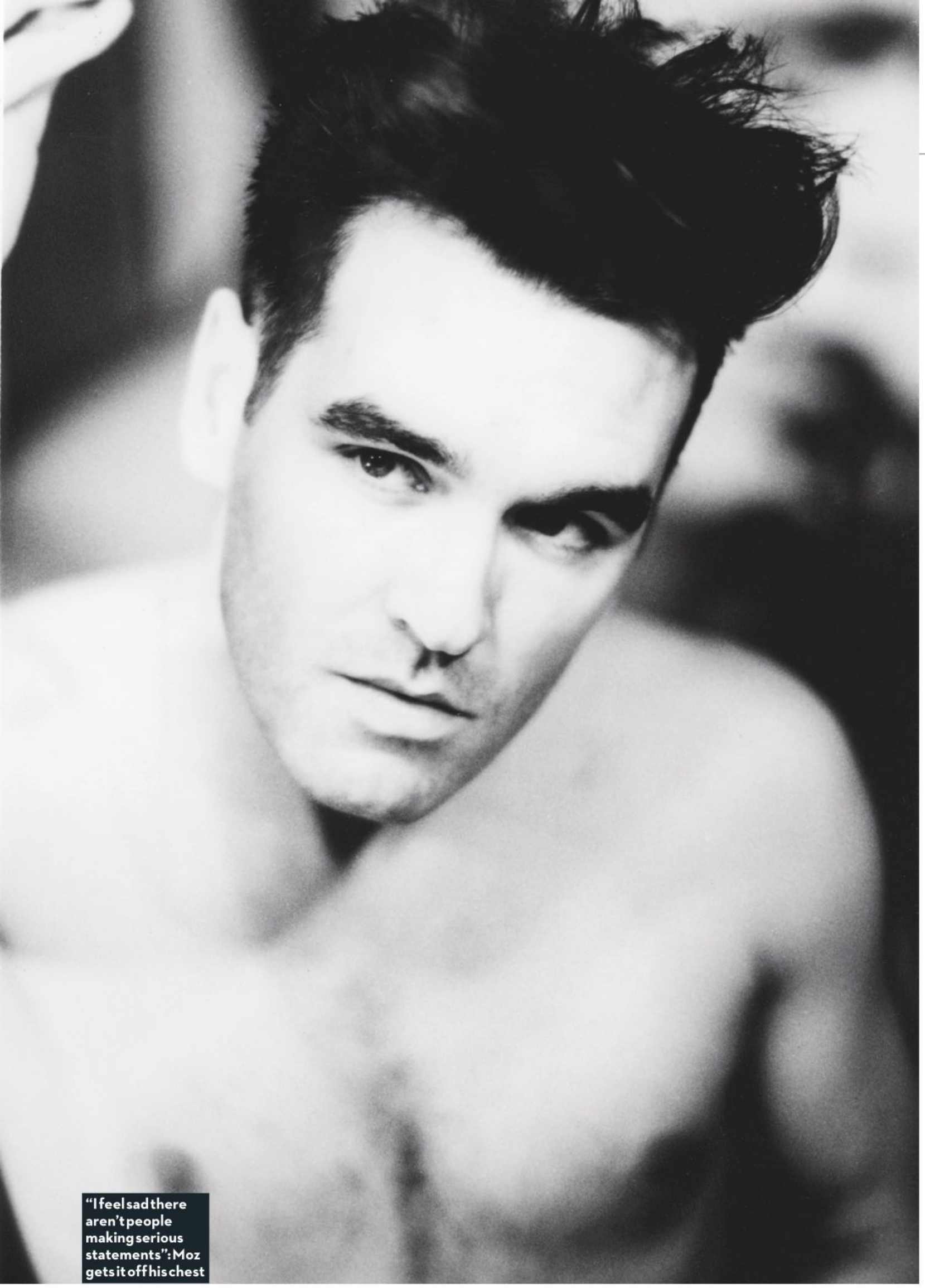
> "I hope others don't sign to HMV… people like The Icicle Works"



But there is the echo of Betjeman-on-Slough in the line *"Come, come, come nuclear bomb!"* I mean, if it was such a rotten holiday, why hark back to it?
That never really occurred to me. The pleasure is getting it out of your system, saying "never again" instead of "same time next year". And the British holiday resort is just like a symbol of Britain's absurdity, really. The idea of a resort in Britain doesn't seem natural.

On the same subject, there's the line in "Bengali In Platforms": *"Shelve your Western plans / And understand / That life is hard enough when you belong here."* Don't you think the song could be taken as condescending?
Yeeeees… I do think it could be taken that way, and another journalist has said that it probably will. But it's not being deliberately provocative. It's just about people who, in order to be embraced or feel at home, buy the most absurd English clothes.

***"An ankle star that blinds me… a lemon sole so very high…"* – this is the first of the many '70s references**



"I feel sad there aren't people making serious statements": Moz gets it off his chest

that permeate the album. Presumably your adolescence always was coterminous with the '70s… but why have you now started to make explicit references to power-cuts and suedeheads? Why is it that you and everyone else have embarked on this reassessment of that decade, all at the same juncture?
It's a great accident. I just felt the need to sing about 1972.

So what was the zeitgeist, the vibe?
The 1970s were like two decades, really; the first half and the second were like two different times. And obviously the middle was dreadful. The first half was curious. Obviously it was still very much linked to the 1960s, an extension of them. But [the] glam rock explosion was, for me, fascinating. It had never happened before and that made it so intriguing and so despised. And then, in the mid-'70s, it became discofied and easy and American. And then, in the late '70s, there was once again that sense of great obstreperousness, which made life so interesting – which it hasn't been since. There was a great deal of talent and imagination, and that doesn't happen very often. It was also very privately English, which I thought was very helpful because, once again, it was a matter of the rest of the world catching up with England, instead of the reverse. And it was a national thing, it brought the provinces alive, and people began to focus on Manchester and other places in a very intense way. Punk was very fair.

This is the standard view of the 1970s, of course, as calcified still further by the *NME*'s feeble gesture of "reappraisal", and the abiding tenet is that everyone was waiting out the 1970s for something to happen. But I wonder, did people really feel at the time as though they were living through tawdry and impoverished times?
Not really. I think that was just the tempo of the times. And old photographs are always embarrassing. Perhaps in 10 years you'll look back and think the way you look is immensely humiliating. [Maybe sooner.] And I might feel the same way also. But one can't deny that the style of the '70s was the pinnacle of debauched nonsense and human ugliness.

Again, on "Late Night, Maudlin Street" you say, "*I never stole a happy hour around here*" – but the whole effect of the song, the way your murmured reveries drift in and out of Vini's entranced playing, just makes the whole time and place seem magical, otherworldly and incredibly precious…
It is a trick of memory, looking back and thinking maybe things weren't that bad, but of course, if you concentrate, you realise they were. But I don't want to sing about football results or importune people to dance. There are too many other people doing that, and I feel sad there aren't people making serious statements. I feel slightly let down. I feel I should look about and see streams of groups being angry and extremely hateful – but it's just not happening at all.

For me, the song is the centrepiece of the album. But you seem not so much angry, as succumbing to memories, drowning in them, leaving this world behind…
But, I think, finally exorcising the ghost of that past and those small times.

It reminded me of the comparison [MM writers] The Stud Brothers made between you and Sinéad O'Connor: the "rigorous autobiography", the way both of you seem to have stopped living in order to document more completely your adolescence.
But my life never really started at any stage – which I know you won't believe, but it's true – so it never really got stopped at any point. But obviously the past is what makes any person. It's because of your past that you're sitting there now, with your list on your knee. Not because of the future or the present. I can't help thinking about the past.

***"Where the world's ugliest boy/ Became what you see/ Here, I am – the ugliest man."* Isn't that a little coy? You must be fairly confident about your looks, by now?**
Well, thank you, but no – if I see a picture of myself in a magazine, I quickly press on and get to the classified ads. And if by some quirk I see myself on television, I instantly change channels.

The line "*Women only like me for my mind*" is clever…
It's the final complaint, I suppose, in the long list of complaints about the past.

It's still not widely appreciated that men can want to be objects, as much as agents, of desire.
But I think men are seen like that, actually – now. Men are aware of their sexuality in a way they previously weren't, or weren't supposed to be. I think women have become very open about their needs and desires, and this was entirely due to feminism. By women being open about sex, it made life much easier for men. And this is why feminism helps everybody, to be slightly more relaxed about life.

There's the line about taking "*strange pills*"… Is suicide something you personally have approached? »

EAMONN J McCABE

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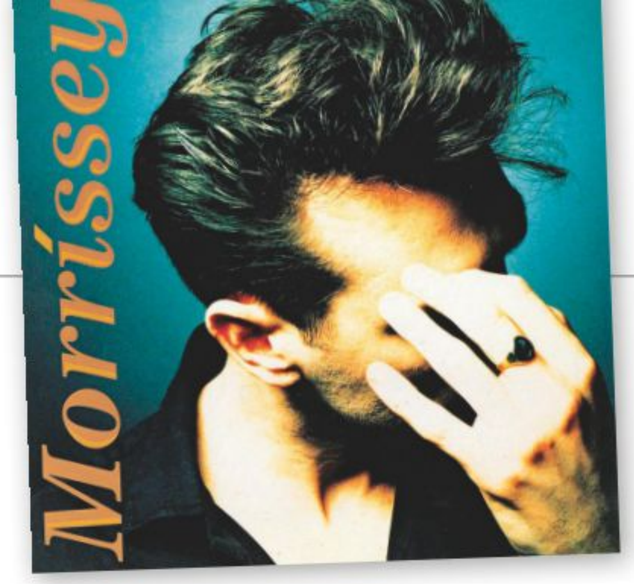

Yes, occasionally. Obviously, I've dwelt on it with magnificent interest.

And you see it as often a noble decision?
I do, I still do. Obviously, the traditional viewpoint is to scowl, but I don't understand that.

There are certain situations where I can imagine it's a very strong statement about your power over your own body, and a gesture of throwing off the "jurisdiction" of the medical and therapeutic "authorities"…
Yes, and it's also a very hard thing to do. It takes enormous courage and strength. Sometimes, obviously, I think it very unfortunate that people reach that stage. It would be very ideal if life was repetitiously joyous. But is it?

Nope. (Mindful of Morrissey's Genet-style, um, interest in ruffians, as evinced by "Suedehead", I ask the following.) Have you always been drawn to people who are tough and streetwise and unlike yourself?
I'm enormously attracted to people who can look after themselves. I'm obsessed by the physical, in the sense that it almost always works. It's a great power to be very physical, to be able to storm through life with swaying shoulders, instead of creeping and just simply relying on your thesaurus. It doesn't work! I've had so many conversations with people trying to convince them of a particular point, and although I find words central to my life…

You'd like to be capable of violence…
Nothing shifts or stirs people like a slight underhand threat. They jump. But most of the friends I have are very verbal and cross-legged individuals and not very demonstrative in any way. So I've never belonged to any physical set. The song "Break Up The Family" is strongly linked with "Suedehead" and "…Maudlin Street", that whole period in 1972, when I was 12, 13. "Break Up…" is about a string of friends I had who were very intense people, and at that age, when your friends talk about the slim separation between life and death – and you set that against the fact that this period of your youth is supposed to be the most playful and reckless – well, if you utilised that period in a very intense way, well, that feeling never really leaves you.

Did you all consider the family a bad idea?
No, we didn't feel that at all. The family in the song is the circle of friends, where it almost seemed, because we were so identical, that for anybody to make any progress in life, we'd have to split up. Because there was no strength in our unity. And that's what happened, we did all go our separate ways, and quite naturally came to no good. I saw one of them quite recently, and it was a very head-scratching experience.

Because he'd turned into the complete opposite of what you all had been?
No, not at all. Which is the confusion.

And your gang, were you outcasts, victimised by "The Ordinary Boys"?
Yes, but half of it, I have to confess, was the effect of deliberate choosing. We chose to reject the normality of life, and be intense and individual.

Do you think, in 10 or 20 years, your life will still be structured around these playground antagonisms?
Yes. People don't really change, do they? They don't change. And the playground antagonisms are replaced by other… more adult antagonisms.

Office antagonisms.
Yes. Canteen antagonisms… getting heavily antagonised while you're queuing up to purchase a doughnut. But surely you have a happy question?

The last track on *Viva Hate* is a rueful little ballad with the self-explanatory title "Margaret On The Guillotine", which describes "*the wonderful dream*" (ie, the gory and spectacular public execution of our PM) that all "*the kind people*" harbour. The chorus, repeated five times, is the plaintive, rhetorical question, "*When will you die?*" You realise all of this will cause you no end of trouble?
Anything that's very clear-cut and very strong causes difficulty, doesn't it? But why should it? I'm not looking for attention. In this case, attention is the last thing I really need. I don't want to be in the *Daily Mirror*. There is something in this above controversy and outrage and all these over-familiar words. It's too easy to be controversial.

> "Artistic growth? I'm quite satisfied with how I am"

So you mean it? You'd like to see her dead?
Instantly.

In a cruel, bloody sort of way?
Yes.

Would you carry out the execution?
I have got the uniform, ready.

One line in the song seems to me to be very revealing: when you say you want to see her killed "*Because people like you/Make me feel so tired… so old inside*". If you compare The Smiths with the previous Great White Hopes, the pivotal rock bands of preceding eras, it's clear that the rebellion of the Stones, Who, Pistols, Jam… was based in some kind of activism or at least action, an optimism about the potential of collective or individual agency. But The Smiths' "rebellion" is more like resistance through withdrawal, through subsiding into enervation.
The fantasy in "Margaret On The Guillotine" is more like wishful thinking, than the resolve to do violence, or even personify violence theatrically, on stage. Isn't the effect of "Margaret…" just to encourage wistful resignation?
Maybe, but I do also firmly believe in action. But also there's a great sense of doorstep rebellion, and stamping of feet. I think, above all, that dealing with people's manipulations is very tiring. You grow old very quickly when every day of your life you're trying to win arguments. Politically, I do feel exhausted. I do feel there are no more demonstrations, no more petitions to be signed. I think those things, and group meetings and creches, are completely boring and a waste of time. I do feel a sense of apathy.

I'm interested you talk about "stamping of feet", because this fantasy of offing Mrs. Thatcher, as though this would somehow solve everything, as if the "evil" in this country weren't a tad more structural and entrenched – well, there's something a bit childish and petulant about it.
Believe me, I'm totally aware of that. But there's also something important about it. The song is silly, it's also very heavy, and it's also very brave. And I sit back and smile. Surely you can see that the very serious elements in it puts the kind of straightforward, demonstration, "Maggie Maggie Maggie Out Out Out" protest song in its place and makes it seem trite and a little bit cosy?

The thing with protest songs is that pop's always been about the immediate, spontaneous and puerile; it hasn't the patience to slog through sub-committees and lobbying and making orderly demands through proper channels. Pop isn't programmatic, it wants the world and it wants it now, and it's much more satisfying to hear about your enemy being slaughtered. Even if it's just a fantasy…
Is it? You obviously haven't listened. I think it's possible. The times are quite ropey. Things are touch-and-go. You don't believe me?

But it's like you say, there's this battening down that's seeping throughout society and the result is enervation and retrenchment. You can feel it on every level of life. A "trivial" example: when you get on a bus. They've got rid of the conductors, to save costs, and you have these pay-as-you-enter buses, and getting on and off takes longer and is more stressful, journeys are longer, and you can see ordinary people get more harassed, bottling it up. But the effect of being shat on is to set people against each other. While the nasty people have banded together, the money people.
Well, yes, there's a lot of organised suffering in England right now.

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I **FEEL A FOOL** doing this, it's like defending eyesight or breathing, but the ghost of The Stud Brothers are leering at me in the corner of my vision, cackling in a saturnine sort of way about "jessie tendencies", so I feel I must put pen to paper on the subject of POIGNANCY. It seems to me that, in its own gentle way, poignancy is as profound an intimation of the contradictions of being, of the screwiness of this world, as any of the mindfuck experiences or headlong plunges into the horror-of-it-all that we conspiratorially celebrate.

Poignancy (and this is why its domain is the minor key) is the exquisite meshing of two contradictory feelings. It's a piercing beauty, or a sweet ache. Anyone who's ever treasured their pain, tried to prolong it, toyed with exacerbating it or been driven to dwell on inside it long after recovery was an option, preferring the company of ghosts to the dreamlessness of everyday society – that person understands poignancy.

But poignancy isn't just retrospective, it's also a mourning of the Moment as it passes, the rapture that's the same as grief, a radiant apprehension of death.

Morrissey has always lived and breathed the poignant, always secretly treasured the gulf between him and the loved one, the difference that makes love possible but makes possession illusory, a delusion, so that, in the end, we are all unrequited lovers. And poignancy is why he obsessively prizes and keeps open ancient wounds.

And it seems to me that The Stud Brothers understand poignancy, and the reasons why its proper language is the ease of elegance, perfectly well, actually – it's just that they vest the power of poignancy entirely in women, which is all very well but doesn't exactly go against the schizoid grain of the entirety of Western Civilisation, and that, when the poignant registers in the vocabulary of a pop male, it's a repugnant indication of some appalling limpness of being, whereas with Sinéad/All About Eve/Heart it is alluringly frail.

I just think, ultimately, that the Lester Bangs aesthetic universe, for all its solipsistic majesty, is such a long way from being the be-all that in the end you do choose to reach out, you do choose the tentative and the touching over the blinding and the bludgeoning every time.

Like most great groups, The Smiths left a trail of imitators in their wake. It's as though groups see something that's great and can't get past the greatness, can only duplicate it. I mean, do you think The Smiths have been a bad influence?
A lot of groups don't really know what to do, and aren't terribly sure of their footing, and they do mimic, and they do overestimate and over-utilise their influences. But originality, you must have noticed, is extremely rare, and it's quite natural, really. And look at all the singers who copy Madonna.

But all those groups, like The Wedding Present, with their rather minor version of the pensiveness and wistfulness…
Well, I can only applaud, really, because it is quite an unusual standpoint, still – and anything that hits against the blaring, bloated Bon Jovi mechanisms, I'll… stand beside.

I think there's a rather ill-thought-out assumption that, because you've bared your soul and this fascinating set of problems has emerged, that, if they do exactly the same, their misery, or awkwardness, is going to be as interesting as yours.
A lot of groups of obviously Smiths-leanings have deliberately tried to trash The Smiths, and all of those groups, to my knowledge, have been instantly bottled… But I'm always totally flattered and amused when I hear a voice that is… indebted.

This idea that honest, unmediated misery is per se gripping, I think stems from the simplistic notion that your fans identify straightforwardly with the scenarios in your songs. But how do they connect with such a statistically remote calamity as 'Girlfriend In A Coma'?
Oh, you'd be surprised! You should read the letters I get. But what are you really saying?

Isn't there something almost aspirational about their identification with such irregular forms of martyrdom? A craving for the hardest hit of self-pity?
I don't feel they're extreme. If anything, I feel they're understated. I think people live very urgent lives. I don't feel I'm in any sense vaudevillian or melodramatic.

When writing, haven't you ever doubted that, what your vigorous introspection was turning up, was going to be of value to someone?
No, I haven't really. I've always thought I've had a very clear view of what I'm doing. And if things do get slightly dodgy, I think I'll notice.

Do you think there are limits to the kind of people who get something from what you do?
Mmmm – but that's true for anybody, really. I'm just pleased that the limits still amount to a sizeable audience. I don't feel the need for more, I don't feel the need to be totally massively global.

On "Rubber Ring", you seemed aware that, for many of your fans, the relationship is going to be a temporary, if intense, even life-saving, one. Do you think that maybe most of your fans are going through a phase, and that most of them will emerge the other end, and leave you behind?
Well, it probably is a phase. But if people move on, it's understandable. In the event that everyone moves on, and I'm left dangling in the recording studio – then it would seem to confirm everything I've ever thought about the cruelties of life!

It seems to me the only people who do persist in that phase and make something tenable out of an unsatisfied, unsettled life, are rock musicians, and rock critics. But has satisfaction ever threatened to loom in your life?
It's never been something I've been immediately faced by. It's definitely a possession of other people. I have a very long list of things I want to do.

Artistic or personal?
Artistic. Nothing else counts.

Does a notion of "artistic growth" have any place in your scheme?
Not really. Can you give me an example of where that's happened?

You're right: in rock and pop, it seems people just have their thing…
And they hone it. Or they start bad and merely get better. Artistic growth? I don't really have any ambitions to change in any drastic ways. I'm quite satisfied with how I am.

You're satisfied with your dissatisfaction?
Totally. I couldn't be happier. I don't want anything to interfere with this state of dissatisfaction.

And there'll be an endlessly renewed harvest of dissatisfied young souls filling up this phase which is your constituency, aka adolescence.
But I don't consider it to be adolescent. I'm not adolescent, I'm 28. It's something quite beyond and more complicated than "adolescence", something that hasn't been thought out yet, but shouldn't be dismissed as "adolescent".

But I have a very high regard for adolescence as an institution; it's a fine way to spend the whole of your life. It's just a handy signifier for a life of restlessness, impatience and insatiability. But would you prefer "a questioning life", maybe…?
Yes, something quite like that… and that's something that can only aid and assist. I sometimes think it's only the excessively normal elements in the industry who take it all so seriously and maybe I don't – rather than vice versa.

And you'll grow old (but not *up*) gracefully…
Disgracefully. I grow old disgracefully!
Simon Reynolds •

"You've caught me at a bad time"

NICK CAVE's 1988 will reap the rewards of two years solitary labour. A gothic novel. A collected lyrics. Even a movie part as a prisoner. But does he ever laugh? "I'm not beyond feeling the occasional bouts of joy and happiness," he concedes.

— MM JANUARY 23 —

"Its eyes, those onyx pools... they held me, they did, paralysed, numb... The silence of the barking spider was destroying me. It was a truly wondrous spider, jet black... But it shunned me..." *– From "The Vargus Barking Spider" by Nick Cave*

BLEDDYN BUTCHER

ARE YOU VERY tired? This is, of course, the first question you have to ask Nick Cave because, the poor dear, he does seem extremely fatigued. He rubs his eyes, massages his temples, jiggles his lighter nervously, and looks anywhere but at you. In an entire evening he meets your gaze twice, for hello and goodbye. You don't mind this: in fact it makes life a lot easier for you, cuts down on all that earnest nodding and means you can listen to "Penny Lover" by Lionel Richie when it comes on the jukebox. »

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"It becomes harder and harder to better yourself": Nick Cave in 1988

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Every time you help Nick locate his cigarettes (an inch away from his hand), you come over all matronly and want to make him some pea-and-ham soup with croutons in it. Nick, you deduce, is either preoccupied with important aesthetic issues or is just a little bit out of it.

Are you very tired?

"Yeah, well, we've been working late a lot, y'know…"

Actually he looks younger than you'd thought. This could be something to do with the haircut, which in turn could be something to do with the film he's been making. In this, tentatively titled *Ghosts… Of The Civil Dead*, he plays a convict called Maynard. Nick Cave has also been working on two books and a record, so perhaps he has good cause to be one blink over the nine. You will patiently, diligently, find out more about these projects. Also, you will learn how the Black Crow's-Feet King responds when an interviewer says, "Don't you ever want to just go Jolly Jolly Ho Ho Ho"? But first you will glean his understanding of: The Truth.

Criticism to you, Nick, must be like water off a duck's back by now.

"No. I'm always offended by any criticism that's made of me by anybody. It's no news to anyone that I get quite upset. I just don't think it's the press's business to have critical opinions. People with no credentials to have an opinion on anything at all… and their views are made public to thousands of people… they actually have an influence…"

They do? I mean, for sure, mmm. Ludicrous, isn't it?

"It is. That somebody can make a living out of writing about rock music. Really! I have trouble dealing with the fact that I'm making rock music. But to write about it… is… is…"

Parasitic?

"Uuh…"

Nimble, svelte, geophilous?

"Unnhh…"

Green with little pink ribbons on?

"It's just incredible that people can find things to say about it week after week. Then obviously they can't, so everything's reduced to personal bitchiness. No other area of the arts would stand for it. There'd be perpetual lawsuits."

I read somewhere that you couldn't stand journalists, because they were never interested in the truth.

"I said that? Oh, I've done the journalists thing enough…"

Oh yeah yeah yeah yeah (count'em). But I was more interested in the "truth" bit actually, Nick.

"I dunno what truth there is to find."

Oh.

"Might sound a bit pompous."

Ah.

"Whisky. No, vodka. No, whisky."

ALL THESE EXTRA-CURRICULAR activities suggest that Nick Cave is a mite fed up with being just a "rock singer".

"I think it trivialises everything! All options. Not just conventionally artistic – it makes it impossible for me to do anything, really, without it smacking of falseness and pretentiousness."

So you think rock music's A BIT SILLY?

"Well, yeah, I do in a way. Sometimes I sit in the back of the van and think, 'What the fuck am I doing here?' I'm 27 years old now. Too old to be doing that sort of thing."

Has it overstayed its welcome? Should it have done a twirl after 25 golden years and exited left? Or is it just that we're greying killjoys?

"I don't think 'the form' has died or anything. I think it's just had its catharsis of creativity for this 15 years or so. But there'll be another one, if not for some time yet. And through that period there'll be a few individual artists who maintain standards. Just as there's some people from the '60s who are keeping some quality and integrity in their work."

Really? Who are you thinking of?

"Um… Bob Dylan. Or Leonard Cohen. People like this."

But it's harder to push back the limits these days, isn't it?

"There is no limit to the imagination. The growth of music is a process of negative responses to what has gone before. For that reason it will continue. People are always inclined to overstate things, so there'll always be others inventing alternatives to that. I mean, I don't think it matters whether it's been heard 20 years ago or so – there's always the individual to stamp his mark on something and make it unique.

"Y'know, I'm not so interested in things being new and original and so forth. I'm particularly not interested in this 'alternative music' that's original and atonal for the sake of it."

You've done a lot of cover versions, haven't you?

"I suppose."

So, forgive the obvious, but if making records is so trivial, why are you still doing it?

"There's an increasing satisfaction in it for me if I make a record and it's a stronger statement than the last. Although each time I believe this time I've really wrung the sponge dry and I'll never be able to do anything worthwhile again. It becomes harder and harder to better yourself. I guess I'll continue to do it until it becomes fairly obvious I'm no longer able to express myself."

So how has the album you're working on now taken things further?

"Oh, you've caught me at a bad time: the recording's at the three-quarter period. The songs invariably lack mystery to me at this stage. It's hard for me to be oozing with enthusiasm. But this is just a temporary symptom. Oh, there are 13 songs, ranging from Bacharach, like a song called 'Slowly Goes The Night', to… extreme violence."

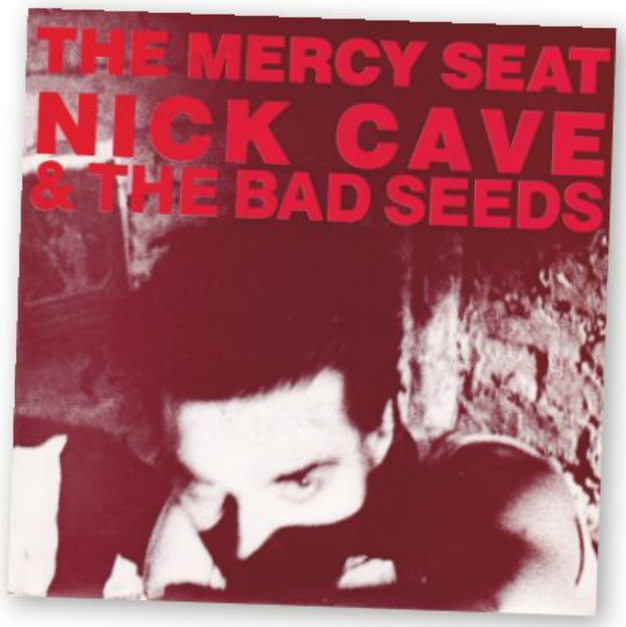
Can you talk about the single (released February)? "The Mercy Seed"?

"Seat."

Sorry?

"Seat. Yeah?"

> "I haven't got the time to wait around for inspiration to hit"



"The Mercy Seat". OK, I believe it's about electric chairs and capital punishment?

"It's uh… juxtaposing The Throne Of God and God's justice, with the electric chair and man's justice."

Is that a good idea or a bad idea?

"Oh, I dunno. It's an idea. It might come across a bit crass to explain it. It's a success. I never was one for a great deal of subtlety, anyway."

Is it a cacophony?

"Both."

My turn: Huh?

"Both a cacophony and not a cacophony. It has a religious, monastic chant going over an incredibly powerful pulsing thunder sound. It's…"

There's a pause of about 40 seconds, followed by a pause of about 50 seconds. Nick, the tapeworm that ate Elvis, has a little crucifix hanging from his belt and a moderately sized red spot on his forehead. I have always thought Nick Cave's nose was remarkable, but tonight I am distracted by the sheen of the jet-black hair. It really is very black. Then I spend some time wondering why we say "jet black". I don't think I've ever seen a black jet. Plenty of silvery ones, but… ah!

Yes?

"What?"

Easier done than said?

"Huh?"

Where do you feel at home, Nick?

"I lived in Berlin for a year but it got a bit much…"

A bit much, you say?

"Oh – just – although I was there for, well, three years, I haven't as yet picked up the language. Not that I made much effort. I kind of miss speaking English. I've forgotten how to form a proper sentence. I've been speaking like a five-year-old."

Is communication with other people important to you, then? Always got the impression you were a bit of a loner myself…

"I'm left to myself quite a lot. I can choose whether I want to be involved in conversations and stuff."

Cave has been spending a large percentage of his time writing at his desk. Can you picture it?

Do you write with pen and paper?

"No, I type. Well – depends where I am."

Just wondering. In April we'll be able to read *King Ink*, a collection of lyrics, poems, prose, stories and drawings. Later, his novel, *And The Ass Saw The Angel*, will at last see the light of day.

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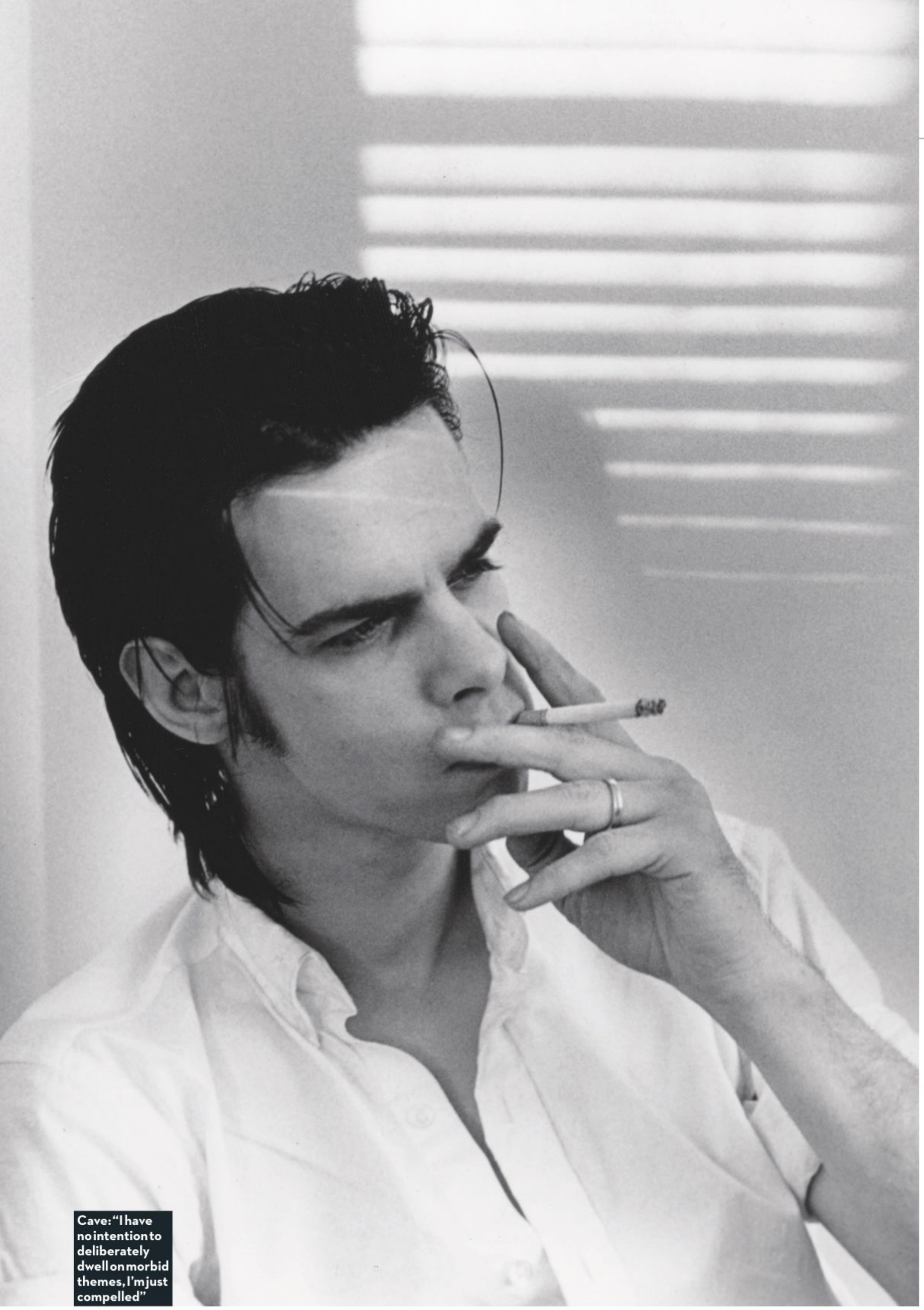


Cave: "I have no intention to deliberately dwell on morbid themes, I'm just compelled"

"1988 will see a lot of product from me, whereas '87 saw basically none. Which by no means indicates I haven't been working – that's all I've been doing. The fruits of that labour will soon be apparent. *King Ink*, which I don't know if you know was also the name of one of the most important Birthday Party songs, will coincide with our album…"

By "our" he means The Bad Seeds, which is currently Cave, Mick Harvey, Thomas Wydler, Blixa Bargeld, Roland Wolf and one Kid Congo Powers.

"It's basically everything I've written over the last six or seven years. Then in a few months the novel appears, which I've been working on for two years. I keep giving it bursts of energy, but then it's interrupted by my music career and so on."

Are you a disciplined writer, Nick?

"It's just a matter of waking up in the mornings."

That's pretty disciplined.

"It's just… hard work. I haven't got the time to wait around for inspiration to hit."

There's a lot of difference between saying you're writing a book and writing one, isn't there?

"I've made a point of not going out for two years. My nightlife has been absolutely zero. My social life is a complete shambles."

Shambles as in nonexistent or as in complicated?

"My broader social life is non-existent. My more intimate relations, they're a plain shambles. Due to the book. No one can put up with living with somebody who just grunts at them twice a day. I find writing the most comfortable and satisfying state to be in."

And have you always wanted to be a writer? Was it a romantic notion?

"No, not at all. The guy who's publishing it suggested it. Neither of us imagined it would turn into this monster."

That's Black Spring Press, yeah?

"Yeah."

Is it named after the Henry Miller book?

"I don't know."

He's not exactly rude, but he's not exactly forthcoming. Last year, John Giorno released the compilation album *Smack My Crack* (Butthole Surfers, Einstürzende, Swans, Tom Waits, etc). Its finale was Cave eerily reading an excerpt from *And The Ass Saw The Angel* (a biblical title), a fleetingly wonderful thing called "The Vargus Barking Spider".

"I suppose that was representative, yeah, if you use your imagination."

Is the hero-narrator based on you?

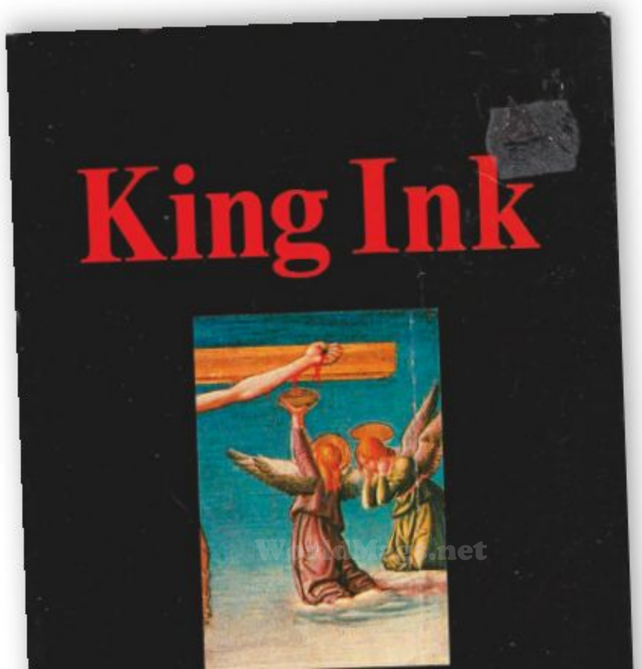
"No. Well – he has various interests which I share. He's obsessive. But he's fictitious. He doesn't look like me, he's not supposed to be me. But I guess inevitable parallels will be drawn."

Where do these spiders come from?

"I think I read somewhere that there was a species of spider in Queensland that barked. It fired my imagination."

It would. Crawl crawl woof. Imagine.

"See, the way the central character interprets things is not necessarily the way they are. He talks about a hobo's hands shaking with emotion as he gives away the spider, whereas in fact he's obviously shaking because he's an alcoholic. As the book develops, the reader becomes more aware that the storyteller is a mean-spirited person who tells a lot of lies."



Does it have a beginning, a middle and an end?

"Oh, it's not any kind of stream of consciousness."

What is resolved?

"It's impossible to say without keeping us here for hours…"

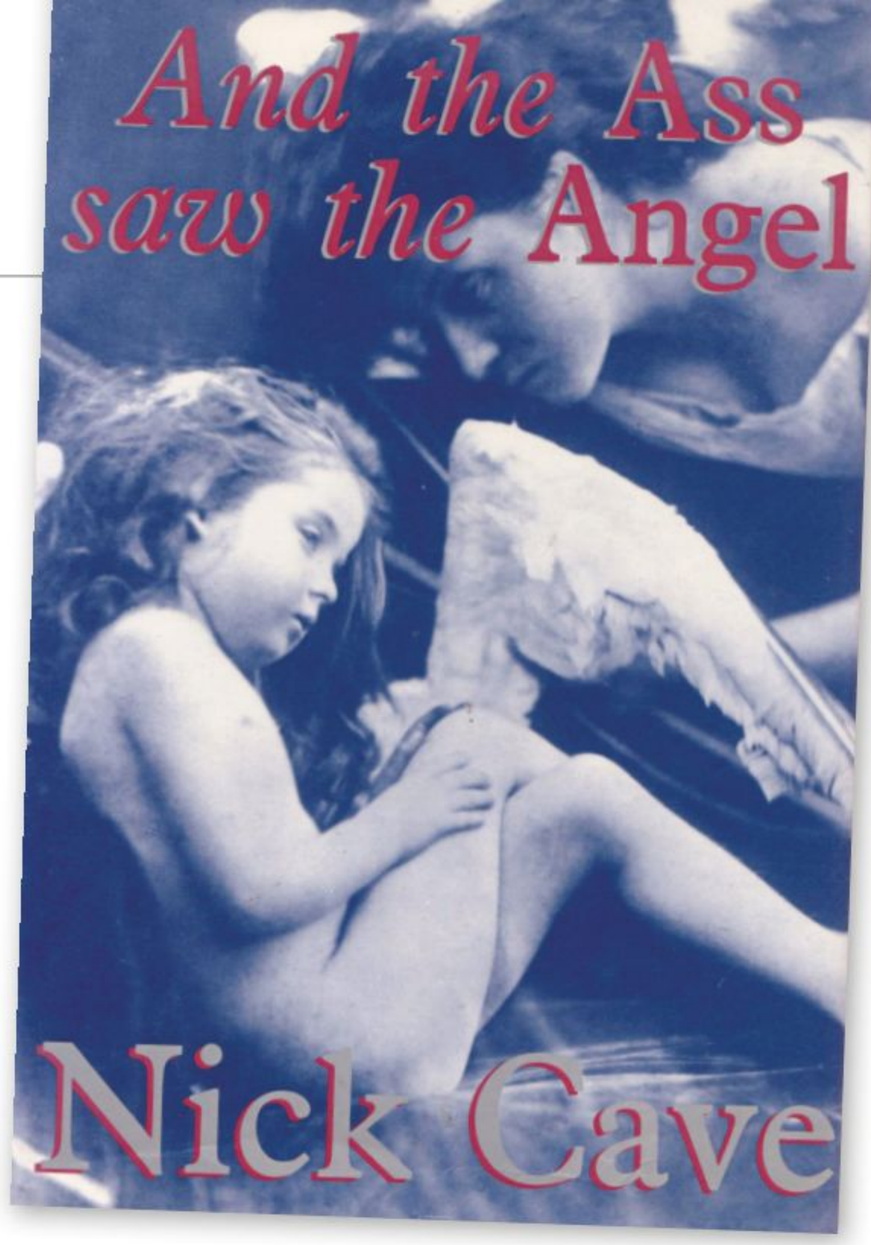
Is there a theme?

"Uhh…"

Is there anything you wanted to say in it?

(*Cave becomes as close to animated as he's ever likely to.*) "Yeah! Of course! Lots of themes. I guess. Isolation. Madness." »

BLEDDYN BUTCHER



You're preoccupied with those, right?

"And death, yes. Still the same things I've always written about. The emphasis changes as I grow older. Aspects of religion which attracted me have shifted somewhat."

Don't you ever just want to go "Jolly Jolly Ho Ho Ho"?

"I'm not beyond feeling the occasional bouts of joy and happiness. I just don't find myself inspired to write about it, that's all. My periods of pessimism are far more individual than my feelings of joy, which are fairly commonplace, if few and far between. I have no intention to deliberately dwell on morbid themes, I'm just compelled. I don't think it's perverse or unusual to do that. It seems quite natural to me."

Do the popular TV shows and papers, with their abundance of Jolly Jolly Ho Ho Ho, stagger you?

"I think people like those things because their lives are in fact so dismal. The purpose of music or literature or television or whatever holds a different meaning to them. For them it's an escape, from their despair. As an artist who's not particularly concerned with catering to the desires of the populace, I'm just compelled to write about other things."

You're an artist?

"Mmm."

Do you have aesthetic ideals?

"Do I? Well, I have my own, of course."

And where do they land?

"They just exist within the boundaries of my own taste. That's what aesthetic ideals are."

Well, say, are they nearer The Beautiful or The Ugly?

"I like all sorts of things – the emotional effect of what is conventionally considered corn is as strong on me in a lot of ways as is what's considered to be high drama or high art or whatever. So my taste is nothing to go by."

Yeah, well, you like all that hackneyed country & western stuff…

"It doesn't stop at that! I like a lot of commercial entertainment. Pop music has the same effect on me as it has on everybody. The triggers of my emotions are not so estranged from everyone else's, as a rule. I've always been extremely attracted to Madonna. Always. Extremely."

And blatant female iconography in general? Marilyn?

"I have a fairly basic conventional idea of what's sexy and… yes, in fact I'm drawn to that sort of thing because of how conventional it is! I mean, when I get drunk and… I always end up pairing off with some secretarial type, rather than the 'alternative' female."

Is that down to your upbringing?

"I don't know why it is. I hate to think!"

Indoctrination, Bruce. Conditioning.

"Yeah well. It's possibly due to having been raised in an all-boys' school. Where the subtleties and mysteries of woman are… left by the wayside."

Is a song such as "Hard-On For Love" a parody?

"No. It was written about somebody, and that was the way I felt towards that particular girl."

So it was deadly serious?

"Oh, absolutely."

"I swear love is blind… and is it any wonder?" *– "Jack's Shadow"*

SO – A NEW year for your new careers. There may be a reading tour of the UK soon. Do you feel as if rock music is for young people and writing books is for slightly older ones?

"You have to be prepared to undergo an incredible change in your life. There must be a lot of people who never made it to their second book; I won't tackle anything like this again for a while, anyway. In a way I regret I ever started it at such an early age. Because I've been sitting at a desk when I could've been doing other things; maybe absorbing a bit of inspiration instead of just giving it out.

"At the same time, I think most of my inspiration is self-generated anyway. That's not such a problem."

What are these "sacrifices" you talk about?

"Your whole life. All things!"

Does it become your lover, then? First thing in the morning, last thing at night?

"Yes, yes it does. And after a while, after you realise other people aren't that interested, it becomes just an inward thing, stored in yourself, no outlets, no feedback, just… plunging. Pushing on in. And finally publishing it is laying open the limits of your creative ability. Correcting is a process which could go on till you die, but at some point you just have to let it go."

And how did you overcome times of self-doubt?

"I don't know if I yet have, actually. The book itself has absolutely no relevance to anything really apart from myself. It's certainly not modern in its themes."

Neither was…

"Oh, who knows?"

Cheers.

Which leaves us with the motion picture, and Nicholas Cave the actor. He was involved in writing the initial draft, but this was later "changed totally except for a few echoes".

> "I've been at a desk when I could've been doing other things"

You play a convict?

"There's only convicts and guards in it. It's about the new hi-tech prisons which are being built. It's kinda based on a true story."

Is it very Australian? (Thinks: *Prisoner Cell Block H.*)

"Well – there are a lot of broad accents. Most of the actors are just ex-prisoners or people off the street. It doesn't specify where the prison is, except it's in a desert. I think the outside of the prison is being shot in New Mexico."

Will it get shown here?

"If anyone'll have anything to do with it. I go back to finish the soundtrack next month. The script I intended was less didactic, more atmospheric. This one is pushing a political point, exposing corruption in high places and so forth."

And how did you take to acting?

"Well, we were doing a 10-million-dollar script with one-and-a-half million. So there was no time to fuck around. I would've enjoyed it more if there'd been time to flex the artistic muscles. It was a bit slap-bang, do your bit, get it done in one take. And the whole thing has to be done by the clock, by the book. It's so tedious. A hot meal at lunchtime and everything. I found that bit difficult to cope with."

Nick prefers whisky, or vodka, to hot meals. It's how he disguises and blurs his natural articulateness, because the blues has taught him it's not cool to be an intellectual. Despite spreading his fields of interest, he remains a definite chronicler of the negative outlook. As chance would have it, our cab driver reckons he's writing a book too.

Really? What's it about?

"Edgar Allan Poe."

And the raven raves on.

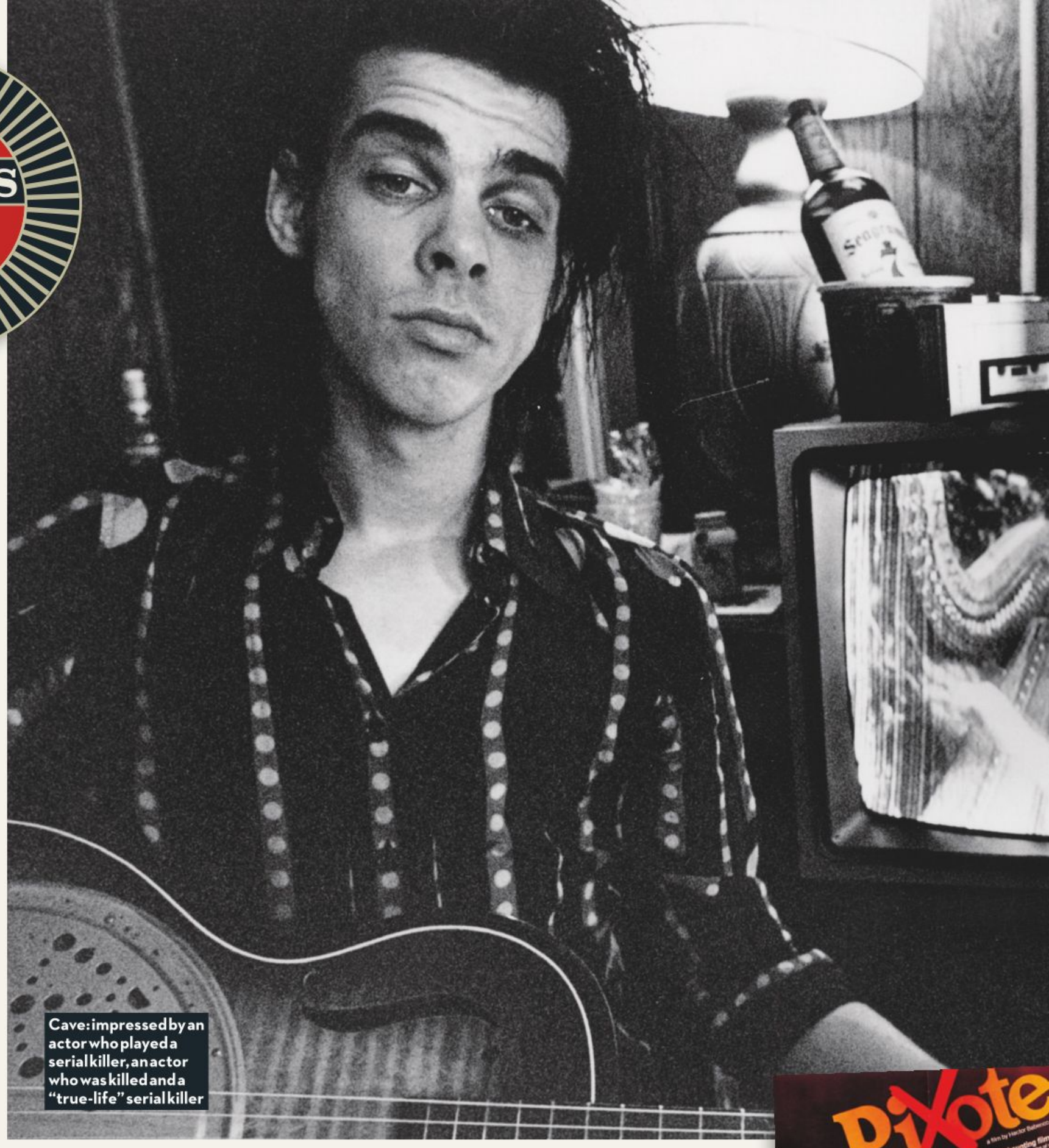
"Never once did I see it move in the coop. Never once did I hear it bark… Then I thought, 'Maybe it's just a mute like me'… Perhaps it was waiting for me to speak first. Oh lonesome spider, if only I could've let you know" *– "The Vargus Barking Spider"*

Chris Roberts •

HEROES
NICK CAVE

"As someone who feels they're clothed in worms..."

MM OCT 22 Nick Cave selects his heroes. Involves Jim Thompson, PJ Proby, Karen Carpenter, Job...



Cave: impressed by an actor who played a serial killer, an actor who was killed and a "true-life" serial killer

Job

Can you put Job at the beginning and the end? Good. Surely you can find some pictures in a Bible or something. Very patient was Job, yes. A perfect example of rigorous faith. As someone who feels they're clothed in worms much of their life, I find him an inspiration.

Joe Spinell

An actor who found the money and wrote the script for *Maniac*, in which he plays a mass murderer. It's a low-budget thing which goes beyond the splatter movie genre; I mean, there's probably better ones for blood and guts if that's what you want. But it's this incredibly moving portrait of a serial killer. I don't know when it was made, certainly during the last 10 years; I only saw it on video. Possibly it wasn't a commercial success. The nice thing is that this guy, who had the idea, and is a great actor, is really ugly in the best possible way. He's also in some prison films. The best parts are when he's on his own and produces some wonderfully lucid and melancholy pieces of acting.

Ed Juergen

"The voice, the voice": Karen Carpenter

He's a lecturer at the Hazelden Centre, Minnesota. Well OK, the Hazelden Clinic. Quite an inspiration to me. Quite old, but most charismatic. He lectures on alcoholism and drug addiction, and certainly had a strong effect on me recently. With this sort of thing there are certain people you look toward for what you can be, how much power you can have, how much strength. He's an ex-alcoholic himself, which proves something about recovery.

Joseph Kallinger

Kallinger is a shoemaker in a book by a terrible writer, Flora something or other, and is possibly the most insane person in the world, a true-life serial killer. He's great. Although Flora tries to put forward a case for the environmentalist, for nurture verses nature, the way Joseph Kallinger was brought up and so forth, he seems to me a clear example of congenital criminality. In a way, the book is also saying that, but it cuts its own throat.

Karen Carpenter

My favourite female singer – the voice, the voice. And she was really beautiful as well. Was I sad when she died? Oh yes. We did a tribute concert. "Close To You" is the song we played.

Ferdinand Ramos

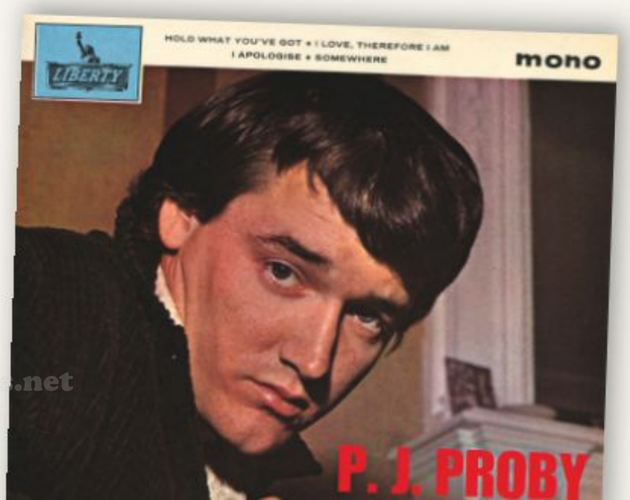
The film *Pixote* may well be my favourite film, and his performance, as a 13-year-old, is incredible. Brazil's most famous ghetto child, one of the São Paolo children. He was shot dead last year in what was called a "shoot-out", shot five times in the chest. Then the gun in his hand was found cold. Brazilian police called the matter "routine". He was the 90th child shot in São Paolo last year – there's no sign of it getting better, no. The film did Ramos no good. The director went on to do things like *Ironweed*...

Jim Thompson

My favourite 20th-century American writer. *A Hell Of A Woman* was clearly the most disturbed piece of writing I've ever read. It is misogynist, but that's not the primary reason I like it. Hmm, that's not going to sound very good. His best books are written from the first-person point of view of an amoral individual outcast. Usually with some deep-running problems which most writers would gloss over. He was never very popular in his lifetime – now he's dead, more films are being made and so on.

PJ Proby

For his version of "Somewhere" from *West Side Story* – the most incredible vocal performance. If I could sing like that I'd be a happy man. No, no irony.



Job

Full circle. And still being patient, yes.

DAVID ARNOFF, REX FEATURES

WorldMags.net

The Fall's Mark E Smith and Brix Smith: making a chaotic, almost trippy album

ALBUMS REVIEW 1988

ALBUMS

The Red Hot Chili Peppers
The Uplift Mofo Party Plan EMI

So this is where all the funk went. The Red Hot Chili Peppers have triumphed in a medium I thought you could only blunder in – fat-slap, pre-electro funk. *The Uplift Mofo Party Plan* is not a modern record – it rarely steps out of its splash of mid-to-late '70s funk idioms. It's been said that they do to funk what the Beastie Boys did to hip hop – cruise into it, dabble with it, imbue it with "attitude".

Well, there's some of that lip, as on "Funky Crime": "*Don't you know funk's colour blind?/ Well, I've committed a funky crime.*" Fortunately, however, they don't dwell on this irrelevant talking-point. And the "humour" is the bass-bending ludicrousness of George Clinton, which melts, ecstatically, into Prince's spunk-funk.

See, what the Chili Peppers have done is read black music not in terms of austerity or clipped authenticity but splurges and surfeits, to waddle and wallow. So get wet in the belly flop, excruciating sass and split of "Funky Crime", the rough, lascivious power chords, the low-riding bass. The Chili Peppers use rock guitar some – imagine Wild Cherry to the power of a delicious hundred – but they never sound like they're in wooden sneakers, never clot or clog.

"Walking Down The Road", for instance, is hard and elastic in all the right places, hitting hard and letting loose. "Backwoods" is bad-ass stuff, with the guitars spilling and spunking up as free as World Domination's or Band Of Susans, with panoramic wah-wahs billowing one after the other.

Even the version of "Subterranean Homesick Blues" works – only a thin man would purse his lips and favour the original – it's a squelching squabble of resuscitated funk motifs. And "Behind The Sun" is – well, it's like "Mountains" by Prince, only better, a rippling paradise.

And the words are textures in themselves. The Chili Peppers know about our stuff. "*Mr Uplift Mofo – my man Bo Diddley/Hit sippin' a bottle of nickel ripple/ Play the lickity split finger lickin' licks/For all you wicked city slick chicks/And all you nitty gritty hick/We'll make your nipples ripple...*" Yow! The juice of a pigfoot!

The Red Hot Chili Peppers aren't a harbinger, or an example of what we "ought" to be getting excited about. If they hadn't existed, it wouldn't have been "necessary" to invent them, and I'd hate to see them held up as an example of grit, or "real" funk, or celebrated merely for some spurious "irreverence". This is serious shit. They are like Prince, a luxury, a weird excursion, a rare, warped victory in unlikely terrain. Get soaked.

David Stubbs, MM March 12

The Fall The Frenz Experiment
BEGGARS BANQUET

If I tell you that The Fall's new LP (discounting compilations and lives, their 10th!!) is the strangest to date, you'll know we're talking industrial-strength weird... The key word in the album's title is "Experiment", lurking there like a bold statement of intent, a government health warning or a sick note from the band's mum. I'd believed that the ill-fated *Hey! Luciani* play had purged Mark Smith's soul of the need to strike out in new directions. Furthermore, the recent developments – groovy cover version, extra added glam and, gawd'elpus, hits! – had left me expecting The Fall to go Big Pop. Instead I've got...

The Fall's most musically chaotic, apparently undisciplined, almost trippy, music for ages. For much of its meandering progress it could easily pass for a Mark E solo effort, so conspicuous by their absence are both Brix's guitar and Marcia's keys. Most of the time, indeed, the lead instrument on *Frenz...* is Steve Hanley's bass. The runaway cement train self-belief The Fall exude live is here all but dissipated.

The opening pair of sort've songs, "Frenz" and "Carry Bag Man", are illustrative, being plodding nonentities whose lyrics add up to little more than tape-loop mantra chants. Further in, "The Steak Place" – basically just Mark and producer Simon Rogers' semi-acoustic guitar – is a Fall-by-numbers advertisement for Berni Inns (enlivened only by the discovery that the corners are occupied by "*hitmen*"), while "Guest Informant" is a 40-second excerpt from a recent B-side. In the midst of all this there are two, almost three, songs that remind you of The Fall's habitual glory...

"Athlete Cured" is, if anything, an old-fashioned Fall tune that engrosses the listener through a storyline that concerns the unhappy (German) athlete of the title whose room is pervaded by the smell of hot dogs, which can only be eradicated by the exhaust fumes from the Volkswagen of his brother, a clerical officer! The album's centrepiece, the long "Bremen Nacht", also deals with Germany in some way, but what exactly it's about is beyond me. Rattling along on a taut, punchy tune that could have introduced one of those late-'50s cop series, its disconcertingly scary atmosphere is added to by incomprehensible voices barking something (orders? Warnings?) through megaphones, and sirens

PETER BROOKER / REX / SHUTTERSTOCK

that slice unnervingly through the song. Great stuff.

The almost-wizard "Oswald Defence Lawyer" ends the record by demonstrating most of its problems. It's an intriguing lyric (any takers for "*the stuffed corpse of Walt Whitman*"?), but it's strangled by being squabbled over by four different tunes.

Because this is The Fall, it will be afforded houseroom and loads more plays than it probably deserves. But, objectively, there's nothing here to compare with, say, "US 80s–90s" off *Bend Sinister*, and overall *Frenz*... isn't fit to share the same planet as *This Nation's Saving Grace*.

Maybe my disappointment is heightened by my overexcited expectations. I'd anticipated *Dare* or, more likely, *Electric Warrior*; *The Frenz Experiment* turns out to be The Fall's *Sandinista*. Yep, that weird... (6⅓)

Danny Kelly, NME Mar 5

The Pogues
If I Should Fall From Grace With God POGUE MAHONE

It's not that The Pogues are at all bad. That would be an absurd statement. To denigrate The Pogues would be to denigrate all of Irish folk, since they are as much a part of that genre as is, say, Dwight Yoakam a part of country & western. That would never do. But, much as The Pogues are renegades within a tradition to which The Dubliners belong, they are simply an ideological nuisance when it comes to rock. For The Pogues have nothing to do with rock at all, and it's when people import them into "our" terrain on the assumption that they provide some kind of shot in the arm, or readjustment of values, that I being to despise them.

If I Should Fall From Grace... does contain moments of cosmopolitan intrigue, forays into Latin territory ("Fiesta") and, of course, "Fairytale Of New York". But the former's incorporation of sultry brass sounds far too close to Kevin Rowland rocketing into the sky on a barrel organ for comfort, and the latter, after a vague depiction of the Manhattan skyline, falls quickly back on the Blarney Stone. These broadening of the horizons don't really work, don't turn The Pogues into anything so generalised as pop, because underneath it all Shane is as blearily shamrock as ever.

Indeed, so far removed is this album from my constituency that I feel scarcely qualified to review it at all (at all).

I wouldn't know a mandolin if it landed in my Guinness, and how well a track like "Thousands Are Sailing" works, according to its own lights, I have no idea at all (at all). What I'm concerned with is the role and reason of Shane's incorrigibly aggressive growl, those guttural yelps of compulsory ecstasy that screech through fierce merry-go-rounds such as "Medley". I'm concerned because I saw The Pogues live last summer and it was an ugly sight. Sure, it was only people getting happy, but it was an undeserved, muddy, beery, degenerate sort of "happiness". The audience were as one hippo, writhing in the mud.

It's this inculcated response which means that The Pogues are ultimately still less radical than Depeche Mode. Perhaps they have attained chart success because they are an unwashed version of poptimism. (Structural poptimism, this is to say, regardless of the content of this or that song).

I will always prefer The Band Of Holy Joy to The Pogues, because the former are more rootless, more under siege, more dramatically un-pop. Whatever The Pogues intend, regardless of how well they achieve their own targets, I'm afraid that people merely use them for consolatory purposes, clutch at them like shamrock, as if rock lacks their beer-bar spirit, as opposed to having jettisoned it.

David Stubbs, MM Jan 16

February 19, 1988: Tim Simenon of Bomb The Bass at Hollywood Studios, Hackney, East London

SINGLES REVIEW 1988

SINGLES

Bomb The Bass
Beat Dis
RHYTHM KING

Limb tussling being the craze of the moment, this recalcitrant devil will be inescapably large now that it's finally released in the UK. As revered in these pages last week, "Beat Dis" signals 1988's late awakening, alarm clock bleeping into surly, sampled splendour. Its clearly insolent eruptions sit atop an insistent beat, daringly clawing fresh ground. Scramble for the door if you must, but leaden boots will provide no defence. No other record hooks like it, or lasts like it. *NME Feb 13*

The Fall Victoria
BEGGARS BANQUET

Manchester's entry for the Eurovision Song Contest? Terry Wogan scuttles around with glee and NME Towers breaks into a quandary as The Fall deliver their neatest five-card trick to date – a wiry commercialised poke at The Kinks' "Victoria". With a smash the looking glass is shattered, and pop has never had it so good. Guitars break free in a gun-toting race which escalates and then heralds the best pronunciation of "Victoria" ever. Shoulders twitch, feet quake and smiles widen at this utterly sponditious cover.

Sing-along: the energy doesn't merely romp, it bounds, crushes, swings and hurtles panache into every crevice of the body. Life and love personified. *NME Jan 16*

The Primitives Crash LAZY

They've been in some close scrapes before, but nothing akin to this. Cheating death at the last second, The Primitives barge in poppily, and that is sufficient to break their ragged bonds. Previously you only needed two of their records to complete the entire set (a fast one and a slow one); now you need a sodding poppy one as well. "Crash" is actually the first Prims disc to come anywhere close to sounding like Blondie, pressed into service as a chart contender by whim of restraint – bonded riffy guitar aiding the hoary old stop-start arrangement to give it a dastardly catchy aroma. *NME Feb 13*

Pop Will Eat Itself
There Is No Love Between Us Anymore CHAPTER 22

If Nat King Cole was ever as big in the clubs as Mantronix, then Pop Will Eat Itself have got it made chart-wise by kicking off their new single with snatches of "When I Fall In Love". Still grieving the loss of my orange POPPIECOCK badge, this soothed the wound a tad: the way the guitars tangle along in a western spy-thriller manner; the daisy-petal chant scattered on top; the scratchy-mix bit at the beginning and end; the relaxed feeling; the way they're harmonising their vocals... *NME Jan 16*

Renegade Soundwave
Cocaine Sex RHYTHM KING

Like a body about to go into cardiac arrest, the pulse quickens and the soul panics, not sure whether to ride out the storm or escape unscathed. Renegade Soundwave control the palpitations and the body takes the biggest dancefloor battering since revellers had to deal with since the Blitz. Sweat it. Sniff it. Hit it. Whip it. Check it. The rhythm: a maniac bashing hell out of a hi-tech junkyard. Don't miss it – you never know how long a good thing's gonna last. *NME Jan 16*

DAVID CORIO / GETTY

1988

JANUARY – MARCH

The Mission in 1988: (l–r) Mick Brown, Simon Hinkler, Craig Adams and Wayne Hussey

WorldMags.net

“Cause enough to celebrate”

In the analytical UK, THE MISSION are slightly scorned. In the USA, however, they have the theatrics to make them very big stars. Even their producer, Led Zep’s John Paul Jones, is along for the ride.

— MELODY MAKER MARCH 19 —

“HOW SALUBRIOUS!”

John Paul Jones raises an eyebrow like Roger Moore, turns up his nose like Paul Daniels, sweeps his cape across his shoulders and strides off across the stage. He’s in The Ritz, New York. The Mission are soundchecking. He must wonder what he’s doing here.

What are you doing here?

“Good question… good question…”

JPJ, bass player with the now defunct and freshly revered Led Zeppelin, is here because he produced The Mission’s second album, *Children*. Some say it’s a homage to his old band, an attempt to recreate their mystery and majesty, a stab at kudos by association. He’s saying nothing on the subject, but the look on his face when he sees the toilet that passes for a dressing room says plenty.

Later JPJ will be introduced by Wayne on stage as “one of my best friends” and will play organ on the encore, “Shelter From The Storm”. Right now, he’s heading for the exit pretty swiftish. Back to his hotel. A different hotel from the band. They’re in Day’s Inn, the old Holiday Inn. He’s somewhere else, somewhere grander. The hierarchy’s still there. The Mission have a long way to go.

A Mission joke about Russia.

Craig: “Who’s the famous Russian gymnast who recently had hits with ‘FLM’ and ‘Respectable’?

We don’t know. Tell us.

Craig: “Nelly Kim.” »

GRAHAM TUCKER / GETTY

WorldMags.net

IT'S A FUNNY place is The Ritz. It's about the size of the Town & Country with a balcony round the top. It must have been the jet lag or something, but everyone I saw looked like an escapee from a hospital or mental institution. They were all either snarling like dogs or grinning inanely. When they danced, they fought, throwing themselves into each other, kicking and punching out. When one girl collapsed down the front, they rained fists on her head. She had to be dragged out by the road crew. Why?

And another thing. They were all wearing bracelets – plastic see-through ones with their names on them. Name tags! Hospital name tags! Jesus Christ, they are all inmates on the lam!

It was explained to me later that these tags were for identification purposes, that you had to wear one to prove you were 21 and could legally get a drink. I still don't understand why you have to be an inmate to get a Bud around here, but still, that's your Yank for you.

Another Mission joke about Russia.

Craig: "Who's the famous Russian gymnast who recently split up with her longtime partner in comedy?"

I don't know. Who is the Russian gymnast who recently split up with her long-time partner in comedy?

Craig: "Olga Corbett."

THE MISSION HAVE been in America a week. They flew first to LA, where they played a gig and filmed a video. How did it go, Wayne?

"Uh, great… except we got into trouble with the LAPD."

Again.

Big grin. "Yup!"

The last time The Mission were in LA, they did a lot of drugs, Craig flipped out, the police were called, Wayne was arrested, the hotel kicked them out, Craig quit the band and the rest found it jolly hard to find alternative accommodation.

What happened this time?

"I hit this girl with a microphone. I didn't mean to. I was just swinging it round and I let it go and heard… uh… 'Thud! Thud! Thud!' Well, I thought, 'Uh oh!' you know, because I really like LA, but something always seems to happen to me there.

"Anyway, it hit this girl on the head and cut her open right across here." He sweeps back the hair from his forehead and traces his finger neatly along the scalp line. "The police were called and I was taken into this room where I was strip searched and all that. They wouldn't even let me put my shirt back on, it was ridiculous."

What happened then?

"Well, y'know, they were asking if I'd ever been in trouble in the State Of California before and, well, y'know, things weren't looking too good. I thought I was gonna be charged with assault or something, but it turned out all the girl wanted to do was meet me.

"She didn't press charges, thank Christ… just wanted her hospital bill paid, which was OK because I'm insured over here for something like a million. She was nice, actually. Big. Amazonian. Quite fancied her…"

The Mission are in New York to play The Ritz and do loads of press. JPJ has flown in from the West Indies, where he's been looking at studios, to sort of help out and sort of hang out. We're interested in whether he's thinking of producing any more bands.

"Well… ha ha… I've got my own stuff to do."

"Ah," says the Mish manager, Tony Perrin, "working with The Mission has been the start of many a career."

"And the ruination of many others," says Wayne, smirking.

They've done "Beyond The Pale" and are into "The Dance Goes On" when Wayne takes his first exaggerated swig of Blue Nun. The crowd whoop and cheer. It's odd – back home many revile The Mission for their prehistoric attitudes, for their style of dress, for their hippy haircuts and loud guitars. Over here, though,

ALBUMS REVIEW 1988

Illusions of heroism

MM MAR 5 Hussey and co climb giants' shoulders...

The Mission Children PHONOGRAM

The Mission are the Dr Feelgood of goth, a poor man's Sisters, a rich man's Cult, a blind man's Nephilim. At best The Mission are loveable buffoons, playful rogues. At worst, the band are the seismic belch emitted after pop's banquet. At all times, however, they are museum curators – The National Trust, restoring the dilapidated foundations of rock, preserving its heritage, embroidering its myth. It's therefore no surprise that *Children* is produced by John Paul Jones and happens to be buoyed around the Led Zeppelin myth – a legend only revered by those who can't remember just how excruciatingly tedious Page and co could be. It's even less surprising that "Tower Of Strength" is a sketchy facsimile of "Kashmir" or "Friends" off *Led Zep III*, that "Heat" stomps around the hemline of Heart, while the bilious "Child's Play" sounds like an Anglicised, lobotomised Toto.

Only once do the grandiose sweeps of guitar actually sound heroic

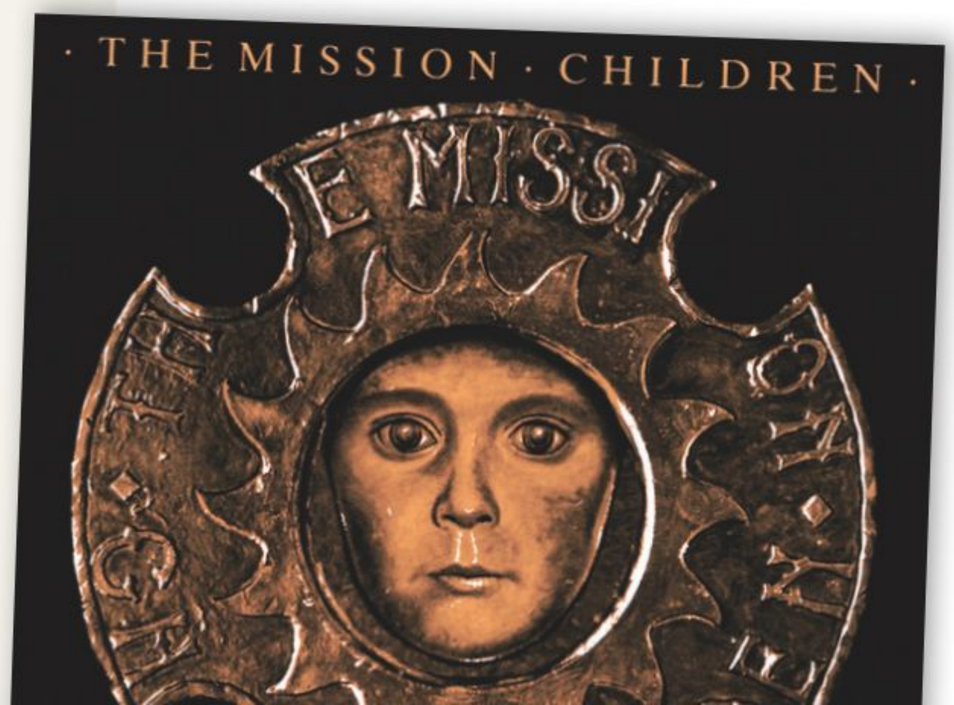
The concept behind *Children* is the usual guff about a quest for instinct and innocence – hence snatches of playground screams and nursery rhymes, the retracing of umbilical cords back to their parental idols. Footsteps echo in the memory as Wayne and his merry men plough safe pastures with the usual flourishing arpeggios on the melodramatic "Beyond The Pale". From here, the full, glutinous sound oscillates between the pomp and glory of "Kingdom Come" and the tranquil 30-second harpsichord lullaby of "Breathe", flitting between the Motörhead pummel of "A Wing And A Prayer" and the acoustic strands of Rodrigo's guitar that entwine the wistful "Black Mountain Mist" (a strikingly original title – "Black Dog" meets "Misty Mountain Hop", perhaps).

The album's material may be more orchestrated, textured and varied, but the band's sphere of reference has not become so miniscule as to exclude the outside world completely. Like all great rock, The Mission are therefore free to create an insulated community, immune to the feckless whims of pop, and standing for that great security blanket: constancy. They may make the occasional stab at relevance – the accelerated tumbling chord slam of "Hymn For America" is The Mission's answer to U2's "Bullet The Blue Sky" – but the band are at their most effective when at their most meaningless.

Like fellow historians U2 and The Cult, The Mission have illusions of heroism, Wayne singing about Neptune's shoulder, serpent's kisses, and crystal balls, but all the dungeon-and-dragon imagery doesn't create the desired elements of mystery and adventure. The only real mystery is how Wayne can sing this pompous bilge with a straight face. Allusions to love and religion are strewn around, but unlike their illustrious forebears, The Mission are too preoccupied with fulfilment to really grasp the idea of romance, and lack the zealot's belief.

Their epic vision is therefore limited to myopic gestures – pilfered from the archives – those halcyon days when people judged the stature of a band by the length of the drum solo. Only once on the whole album (the drum-less, effortless and astonishingly affecting "Heaven On Earth") do the grandiose sweeps of guitar actually sound heroic. The rest of the time the band seem too busy looking at people looking at them to really look elsewhere.

Using relics to create new relics, The Mission have probably made the finest Zeppelin record Led Zeppelin never made, but one man's memory lane is another man's blind alley. It's surely time to detonate the ruins. *Ted Mico*



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people believe in rock'n'roll and they want their heroes as big and bad as they come. I lost count of the people who were mystified by Rick Astley's success – they could see nothing in him but your average Joe.

The Mission, on the other hand, have the right makings for success, the right looks and attitude, the right minor outrages. Their reputation precedes them. In fact, the last time they played this very place, someone who needs must remain nameless came backstage and reported that labelmates Curiosity Killed The Cat were in all sorts of trouble back home for admitting taking acid before appearing on a kids' TV show. "Front pages everywhere," he'd said and then proceeded to tell the boys they could have any drug they wanted, just put it on the tab.

This time there are no drugs around, but just the sight of Wayne swigging wine or sinking to his knees and unbuttoning his shirt during "Garden Of Delight" is the stuff of rebellion in a nation where the movie *Sammy And Rosie Get Laid* has been abbreviated to *Sammy And Rosie Get* … and the words "Goddam" are excised from *Young Frankenstein* when it's shown on TV.

"OK, so who wants to fuck me?" asks Wayne.

The crowd respond like he's just pulled out his todger.

"Ha! I don't believe you!"

The Mission's set tonight is not the set you'll see in Britain. It's shorter, shorn of Wayne's more grandiloquent gestures and robbed of the infamous Eskimo camaraderie. Relying on some older stuff like their monstrous but moving version of Neil Young's "Like A Hurricane" to ease the crowd into the new, unfamiliar numbers, Wayne's as much a master of ceremonies as pop idol, attempting to draw the audience into his confidence – something, perhaps, he's learned from watching Bono.

"Some of us aren't feeling that well tonight," he informs us, grinning. "Craig found a Guinness bar last night."

And indeed, Craig had, just up the road from the hotel. The way he tells it, he was chasing 'em down with Bushmills, staggered out at some unearthly hour of the morning and chanced upon an open deli. Ravenous and roaring, he'd gone in and filled his plate with mashed potato, bemused by the protestations of the staff. It was some while before they could get through to him the fact that his plate was, in fact, heaped with ice cream.

Yet another Mission joke about Russia.

Craig: "Why shouldn't you wear Russian underpants?

I don't know, why shouldn't you wear Russian underpants?

Craig: "Because Chernobyl fallout."

THEY DO "SACRIFICE" and "Tower Of Strength" and "Dream On" and "Wasteland" and Wayne says "groovy" a lot for some reason, and then they saunter off. The crowd calls them back and Wayne thanks them.

"Thank you very much. I don't think this is really deserved, actually. We haven't been very good tonight. We'll try and make up for it now."

They do The Stooges' "1969" and, from where I'm perched on the balcony, I'm dead opposite Iggy Pop, who looks great with his hair a bit longer than when I last saw him. Iggy doesn't move a muscle throughout.

Later Wayne tells me Iggy nipped backstage and asked him out to dinner. What did he say about "1969"?

"Oh, he thought it was great. He said it was better than he could do it."

Right now, though, Wayne's writhing around the stage more like a kid in a sandpit than, say, Jim Morrison. He meticulously peels off his shirt and shoes and socks, accepts a cowboy hat from the crowd, tries it on and wings it back, introduces JPJ and Mars, an itinerant saxophonist last seen in Britain playing with The Psychedelic Furs, and launches into "Shelter From The Storm".

He's trying to lift the show, trying to force it, physically, into a higher dimension and suddenly it occurs to him to climb the speaker stack and head for the balcony. He clambers up with difficulty while the band integrate "Light My Fire" and "Hello I Love You" into "Shelter…" – the old Bunnymen trick – and the first person he encounters is… me!

Hello Wayne.

"Hello Steve," he sings and hands me the mic while he scrambles up onto the balustrade. He's now precariously perched some 30 or more feet above the crowd and he grabs the mic and makes for the back of the hall singing Led Zep's "Rock And Roll".

Working his way around the precipice, he scrambles back down onto the stage with, for all I know, the grace of an angel. I missed this bit. You see, he trod on my balls on the way back and I spent the end of the gig in a foetal position, blinking back the tears.

Brazen Hussey: the Mish appear at a festival in Bourges, France, on April 5, 1988

"I **WAS A BIT** bloody dumbfounded when I met you on that balcony," he says backstage. "Sorry I trod on your bollocks. Here, you can dangle them in here if you like."

Wayne's stripped to the waist and has his feet in a bowl of water.

"Cut me bloody foot. Gotta watch out for infection."

There are four girls on the bench next to him, all vying for his attention. One is breaking up a rose he's earlier thrown into the crowd and dropping the petals into his footpath. He looks like a cross between a garden gnome and a grinning Buddha.

Someone comes in and says there's a girl crying outside because she can't get in to see him. Apparently she's English, so Wayne says let her in.

The DJ, meanwhile is playing "This Corrosion".

"I'll bloody kill 'im!" Wayne jokes as the girl appears and starts into this anecdote about how she once danced with Craig at some disco or other. The other girls are getting jealous and the boldest, the one in the All About Eve T-shirt, climbs onto his knee and dangles her feet in the bowl too. Pretty soon there are six people paddling and no room at all for my poor balls.

In the outer room backstage, Mick and Simon are necking champagne and keeping well out of it. Richard and Tim Butler of the Furs are there too, and Richard reckons he's seen this lot of liggers before. "Same faces," he says, "different T-shirts."

"I'm only t'bloody guitarist, me," says Simon, popping the cork from another bottle. "Don't bloody mind me, anybody."

Mick tells me it's how he stays sane, acting the fool the whole time. Tony Perrin says he was sweating over whether he'd remembered to insure Wayne while he was doing his balcony bit, Wayne's next door telling the admiring hordes how he "didn't give a fuck" and Simon's just escaped from another record company handshake.

"Ee," he says, "life's just one bloody line of meeting folk, innit?"

Six months ago, from what we were being told, you couldn't get decent money on all four members of The Mission making it through to the end of the year. But here's Wayne, up and off to MTV by 10 on a Monday morning – the model professional. He joins us for a swifty in the bar later.

"What a bloody day," he sighs. "Still, the single went up one place in the charts and Liverpool beat Everton 1-0, so there's cause enough to celebrate."

He downs a vodka and heads for bed. A survivor if ever I saw one.

Steve Sutherland •

> "Sorry I trod on your bollocks. You can dangle them in here"

RICHARD BELLIA

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“You’ve gotta take the blame”

The late, great TOWNES VAN ZANDT hits town for a show few thought they would ever see. In advance, a talk about dogs, murder, drugs and drink. “I do go on benders,” says Townes. “Have you ever woke up with your arms strapped to your sides?”

— MELODY MAKER JANUARY 9 —

DO YOU THINK you’ll ever get to heaven, Townes?

“I don’t see exactly why not. I’ve done a buncha things that I maybe shouldn’t really have done, I’ve been down the wrong side of the road more’n once and I know I ain’t no angel. But I’m no sinner, man. Hell, there’s been a whole lot worse’n me.

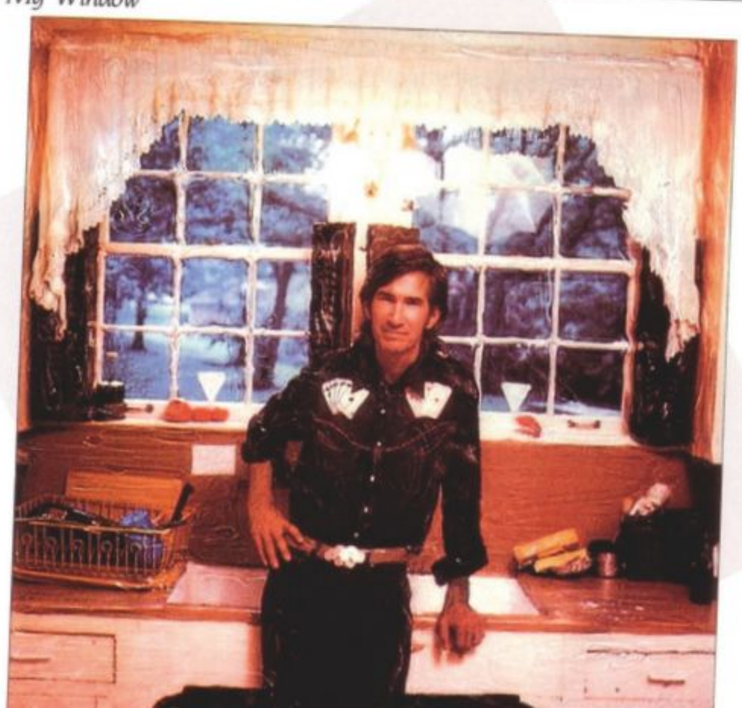
“But I tell you one thing. If it should so come about that I get to the gates of heaven, I’ll want me a serious talk with Saint Peter there. I mean, there’ll be a few things I’ll want to be clear about before I march on in. They ain’t gonna get me in there unless I know just who I’ll be sharing eternity with.

“First thing I’d ask is, ‘Is Vincent Van Gogh in there?’ We were talking about heroes a while back and Vincent Van Gogh is one of mine. And if there’s a yes or no about his whereabouts, if he ain’t there, I’d have to think about goin’ in.

“And then I’d ask about Geraldine. Geraldine was a dog I had, lasted through three wives. Now it says in the Bible that there are no beasts in heaven. And if that’s the case, I reckon I’d have to turn my back right there on ol’ Saint Pete.

“You know, if Geraldine, if she can’t chase racoons through the clouds of heaven, I’d walk away from it. Heaven’s no bank, man, they can’t sell that stuff to me. If they ain’t let me dog in, man, I’d rather go back to Mexico…”

Townes Van Zandt
At My Window



ALAMY

TOWNES VAN ZANDT wears his life on his face, like the scars of imagination. He’s a lot like his songs: lean, lyrical, wry, laconic and reflective; burdened by a lingering sadness that is sometimes beyond description, made bearable only by a sense of humour that swings on very loose hinges; a lover of words »

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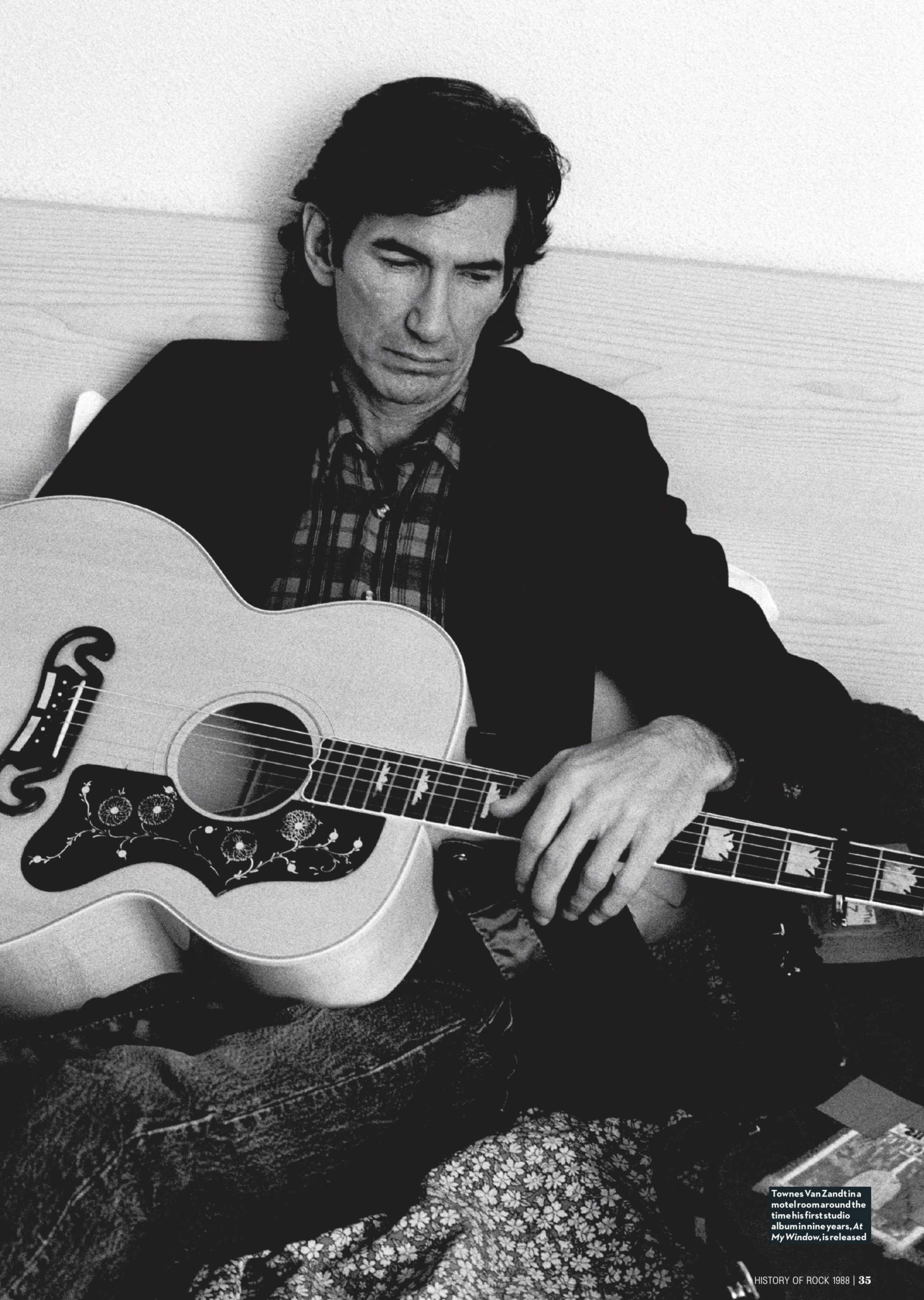
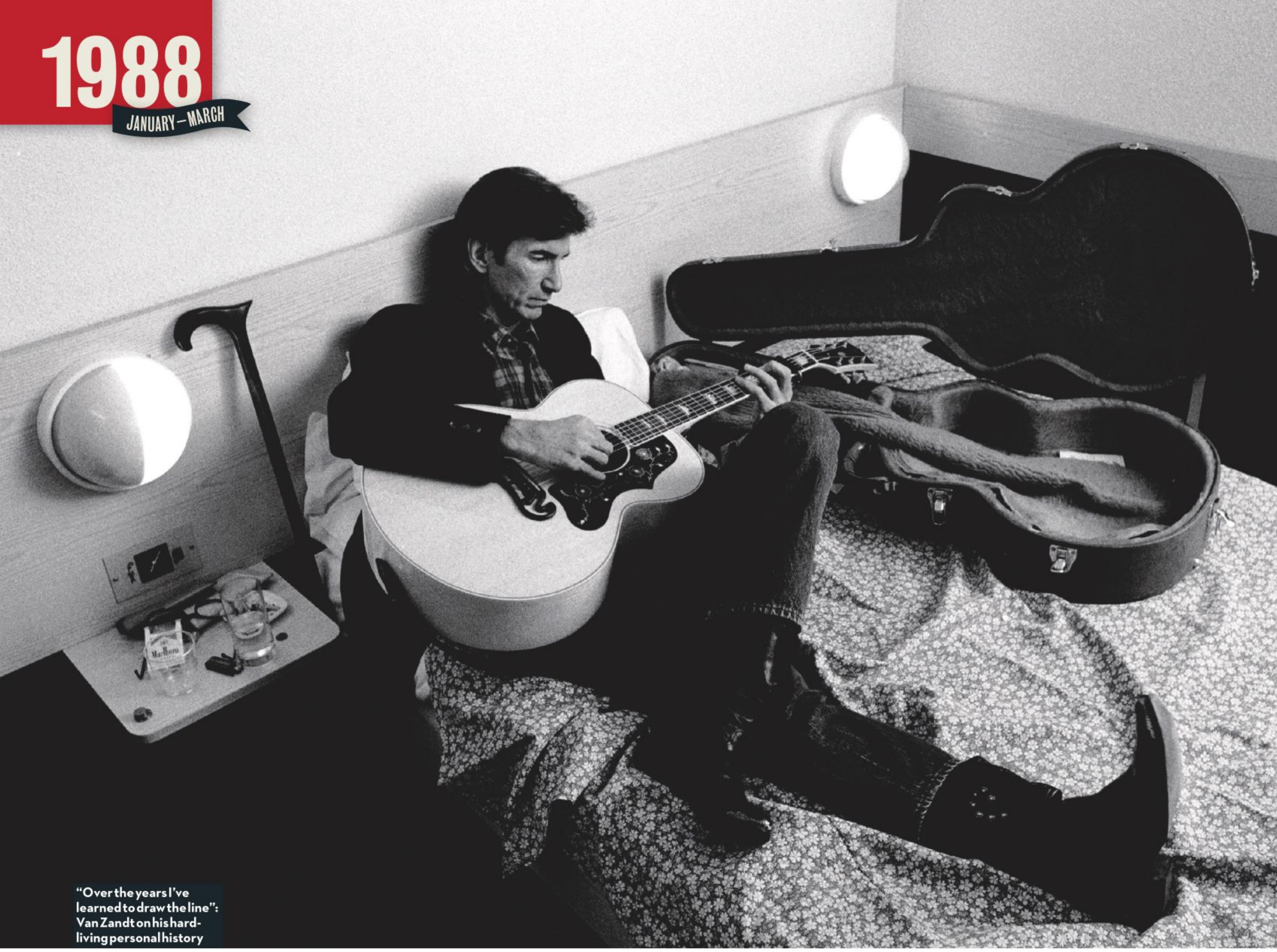


Townes Van Zandt in a motel room around the time his first studio album in nine years, *At My Window*, is released



"Over the years I've learned to draw the line": Van Zandt on his hard-living personal history

and anecdotes, whose conversation almost always takes the scenic route in reply to even the most straightforward question, which makes for highly entertaining accounts of circumstances whose specific details – the drab history of events – remain tantalisingly vague, rearranged, anyway, with virtually every retelling.

The first time I saw Van Zandt was in a documentary film called *New Country*, made in the late '70s. The film crew had driven out to the remote shack in Franklin, 17 miles outside Nashville, where Townes was living at the time with his wife, Cindy, and his dog, Geraldine.

Townes opened the door to welcome the cameras with a Winchester repeating rifle in one hand and a bottle of Jack Daniel's in the other. He was already very drunk. Nevertheless, he insisted on taking the film crew on a guided tour of his land.

He was carrying a gun, he told them, because he was afraid of being attacked by the giant man-eating rabbits that infested his property and with whom he was constantly at war. The rabbits were dangerous. They were killer rabbits, no doubt about it, and a man had to be prepared to defend himself against them. The rabbits were smart, too, which made them even more difficult to handle. He'd seen them digging holes around here that a man could fall into and never be seen again. With this, Van Zandt suddenly disappeared, arse over elbow, into a very large pit.

"See what I mean?" Townes roared from its depths, where he was even now sprawled, too pissed to get back on his feet.

The film crew backed off in a rush, clearly convinced they were dealing with a madman. But this was nothing new for Townes, who had been disappearing down holes of one kind or another for years.

LET ME TELL you this much about Townes Van Zandt's career. He has been singing and writing songs since 1966, when he dropped out of the University Of Colorado. By his own account, Townes wasn't an especially conscientious student. In fact, he spent most of his time at the university drinking and consuming vast amounts of highly illegal narcotics. After he dropped out, he returned to Texas, where he started playing bars and folk clubs in Houston. He recorded his first album, *For The Sake Of The Song*, in 1968, for Poppy, a small, independent label with whom he had recently signed. Over the next five years, he made five more albums for the label: *Our Mother The Mountain* (1969), *Townes Van Zandt* (1970), *Delta Momma Blues* (1971), *High, Low And In Between* (1972) and *The Late Great Townes Van Zandt* (1973).

Townes's reputation was made by these records, which contained some of the finest American songwriting of their time. Unfortunately, the albums were almost impossible to get hold of and quickly became totally unavailable. While contemporaries and friends did everything they could to spread word of Van Zandt's genius, he hung in a perpetual twilight, his career thus far a catalogue of commercial disasters and tangled business contacts.

No one pretended that Townes wasn't difficult, and he had a reputation for being erratic, demanding, ornery, a bit of a bastard, frankly, when he was wild, especially when he was drinking. It was often, or doing drugs – heroin was a favourite for a while, but anything would usually do – which is what he was doing when he wasn't drinking. It was a combination that inevitably made him intolerable to have around. Townes lost a lot of friends at times like this, although the best of them have stood by him.

When the film crew from *New Country* turned up that afternoon – it was a wintery, churlish day – in 1977, things were beginning to turn around for Townes. Emmylou Harris had just included a version of his classic Western ballad, "Pancho And Lefty", on her new album, *Luxury Liner*. Harris' reading of the song had inspired a new interest in Van Zandt's work and had virtually single-handedly revived his career. A new manager, John Lomax, straightened out his business complications and negotiated the re-release of most of his early recordings on the Tomato label. There was even a new double album, *Live At The Old Quarter, Houston*.

In 1978, he released a new studio album, the dark, despondent *Flyin' Shoes*, produced in Nashville.

After that, nothing. Townes seemed simply to have vanished. In the meantime, new country heroes were elected: George Strait, Randy Travis, Dwight Yoakam. None of them were in the same room as Townes, but George was suave, Randy was a hunk, and Dwight was a worthless piece of piss whose glamorous poses successfully connect the shit out of

ALAMY

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virtually everyone in sight: they got by. Time passed. And then Townes came down from the mountains where he'd been living; he straightened himself out; married his third wife; eventually got a new record deal and released a new album.

At My Window, released last year, is another great Townes Van Zandt record, typical of the best of its predecessor, full of forlorn, desperate hymns. It's another uncompromising collection, emotionally grave: Townes has nothing much to celebrate; pulling through is all there is to it, and life is pitched somewhere between nothing and not much. The album is available here on Heartland, a division of Zippo, who have also recently released another live album, *Live And Obscure*. The latter record features versions of some of Van Zandt's most enduring songs. New listeners should start here and work back through whatever albums of Van Zandt's are still available.

TALKING ABOUT THE *Live At The Old Quarter, Houston* album caused Townes to reminisce. I drew up a chair and lit my pipe.

It transpired that the Old Quarter was a rough old place, fights most nights, Mexicans wielding knives, drunken rednecks bursting through the doors with shotguns; a lot of stabbings, therefore, and the occasional shooting, but otherwise pretty uneventful. The worse place Townes ever played was in Odessa, Texas, the name of which he can't presently remember.

"When we arrived," he continues regardless, "we thought it was gonna be a cowboy bar, which would have been hell. Turns out, though, it's a Mexican bar, which isn't so bad. See, cowboys like to fight and if things get outta hand, somebody'll pull a gun and shoot. Mexicans don't carry guns. They carry knives. They can be nasty, no doubt about it, but on the whole I always figured it would be safer in a place where they carried knives rather than guns.

"Anyway, we were third on the bill, and this place is like an old airport hangar with this big glistening ball, biggest one I ever saw, revolving over the dancefloor. There was me, a full-blooded Indian named Jimmy Gray playing bass, a friend of mine from Kentucky named Rooster playing guitar, Cody, the Cajun fiddle player, and our road manager, Harold. There was also this constant crashing of beer bottles and all these Mexicans screaming, 'YVIVA ROCK'N'ROLL'. We played the fastest version of 'Wabash Cannonball' you ever heard and got off.

"We were followed by this, I don't know what he was, a black guy, or Creole, maybe half French and half black. He had a big cape on, with sequins all over it, and he sang the weirdest music you ever heard in your life. The Mexicans dug the hell out of him.

"Meanwhile, I'm trying to figure out how we're gonna get outta the place without someone relieving us of our money. It was the opening night of this place and the manager's all smilin' and he's just paid me 1,000 dollars, which is a lot of money to be carryin' around in a place like that. I just got Harold to bring the car up to the dressin' room and we made a dash for it and I said, 'Harold, if anyone tries to flag you down in this parking lot, run them over, just run them over.'

"Harold would have, too. He was a good old boy. I remember we had a 1,550-mile drive after that show. Cody tried to sleep on the hood of the car. I climbed out on the roof. It sure was a long ride…"

WE WERE TALKING about movies when Townes told me that one of his wives had been murdered.

"She was hitch-hikin' down from LA to San Diego to pick up her stuff so we could roll straight after I got through recordin' an album I was doin'. And she was picked up and then she was stabbed 14 times and thrown out of the car. She crawled over to a house and a woman answered the door and she managed to say my name and say that she was Leslie Jo Richards from Houston. And then she expired. I got a phone call about four o'clock in the morning from a friend in Texas. The next day, I had to finish the album. There was one more song to record, a song called 'You Are Not Needed Now'. I got halfway through the song and I didn't want to break down, but I just told the engineer I had to go. I went down to Long Beach, about 40 miles south of LA, where my friend Guy Clark was livin'. I said, 'I'm goin' to the mountains.' And Guy said, 'Man, it's late at night and I don't think your car will make it that far.' I said, 'Man, I'm goin'.' And I left, and I lived for six or seven summers in the mountains.

"And that's why I couldn't sit through *Gone With The Wind*. Leslie Jo Richards looked too much like Vivienne Leigh."

Most people who meet Townes want to talk about "Pancho And Lefty". It's the kind of song that everyone is convinced must have a story behind it. I joined the queue, but Townes was no more forthcoming on this occasion than on many others. He did, however, manage to recall the general circumstances that had inspired its composition.

"I had a gig in Dallas at the time. And Billy Graham was there too, and the Maharishi also had a gig in town. Which meant that there were no rooms left in any of the hotels. Everywhere was full. Like, Billy Graham had 500,000 born-again Christians every night for four nights and the Maharishi had 250,000 at his show.

"I was playing four nights at a little club downtown. I drew nine winos and an ugly girl. And every night I had to drive 40 miles to a motel outside town because there was nowhere else to stay. Nothin' was happenin' out there. That's where I wrote 'Pancho And Lefty'.

"You want to know somethin'? After Dallas, we moved on to Houston. An' I'll be damned if Billy Graham and the Maharishi didn't follow us. Billy Graham had 500,000 people at the Astrodome, the Maharishi's at some stadium with 250,000 people. And I'm in a little club downtown. And I draw the same nine winos and the same ugly girl."

Van Zandt's best songs go out where the dogs are barking, where there are bones in the bed and rocks in the river. They are unflinching, often songs about love that are full of pain. Does love always have to walk hand-in-hand with pain, Townes?

"Less and less, but it will always be there. I've got a boy, Will, and when I'm with him I feel love without pain. When my dog Jolene comes sniffin' around at breakfast, there's no pain involved. Or when you're on horseback ridin' along the East Marin pass and the horizon's stretchin' from here to here, there's no pain in that. I love that, it doesn't hurt."

Are you a nostalgic person?

"No, I haven't got a good enough memory."

What would you have done if you'd caught the man who murdered your wife?

"I would've staked him out over an ant hill, cut off his eyelids and skinned him alive."

> "The manager's all smilin' and he's just paid me $1,000…"

THIS IS TOWNES, talking about his drinking and other excesses.

"It's a part of my life that'll always have to watch. I do pretty well, but I do go on benders. Have you ever woke up with your arms strapped to your sides? I've done everything in my time, but over the years I've learned to draw the line. I've got a family and a livin' to make, it's time to be more careful. Over the years, I've kinda tried everything, but drinkin' was hard to deal with because it's legal. Many moons ago I did heroin, and for five or 10 dollars I'd end up leavin' town…

"Now, I'm a little more responsible. I have to be in a certain frame of mind when I go on stage at 10 o'clock tonight. I can't stumble up there when people have paid six bucks or five quid. I've done that over the years, maybe two or three times, not as many as my reputation might suggest, but I have done it.

"But if you're not in a proper condition, you've gotta take the blame for a bad show. Mind you, if the soundsystem is screwed up, if the beer's not cold enough or if the waitress is weird – that's your fault, too."

Van Zandt had finished his drink. In a moment, I would lose £10 to him on the toss of a coin. Now, I asked him what he'd like for an epitaph. He laughed.

"I never thought about it before… I think a good one would be, 'Stay True'. At least it would be cheaper to carve than 'There Was A Young Man From Bath Who Didn't Know How To Laugh"…

Then he flipped a coin.

"Heads?" he said. "Or tails?" *Allan Jones* •

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1988

JANUARY – MARCH

“They’ve joined my club”

Led Zeppelin. Venereal disease. John Lydon. Not much is off-limits for ROBERT PLANT these days. With Zep now a hip influence, he confesses warmth for The Cult, if not for Rick Rubin and The Mission. Still, at least it means John Paul Jones has “found some young boys to play with”.

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February 3, 1988: Robert Plant plays London's Marquee Club shortly before the release of his latest album, *Now And Zen*

ANDRE CSILLAG / REX FEATURES

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— MELODY MAKER JANUARY 30 —

IT HAPPENED WITHOUT warning on stage at Wembley in September, 1985. One minute Robert Plant was up there doing the business as usual, and the next…

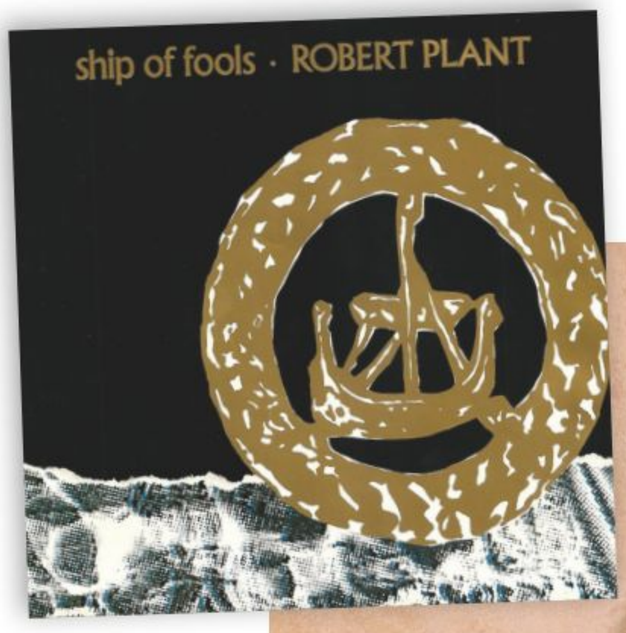
"A little light came on above my head."

The little light was probably something similar to the one which, some years before, had startled that Paul chap on the road to Damascus. Robert Plant peeled a satsuma and stared across the kitchen table in his London management office as he recalled the great Moment Of Illumination.

"It happened halfway through the set. I might've been singing '*Squeeze my lemon till the juice runs down my leg*' or '*I'm a fool for a cigarette*' – no, seriously, it could've been anything – but I suddenly realised that I'd taken this little journey round and round in circles, ever-decreasing, dumbfounding everybody by showing them how to waste a perfectly good career.

"I'd been writing music and going out of my way particularly to avoid commerciality and, more so, the obvious trappings of a Led Zeppelinite. My solo career has meandered self-consciously between total amnesia and rejection of anything I might've been doing before 1982 and an inexplicable desire to write songs with no choruses. Those things, and many more of the things I've been doing, have been premeditated, determined, hot-headed and, I think, pretty crazy.

"I had the clap so many times years ago that I was almost immune to penicillin, and in music, subsequently, I'd 'oooohed' and 'babyed' so many times I couldn't do it any more. I lost a lot of the power. I tried to convince everybody this was contemporary. So I finally woke up at the Empire Pool [as he sentimentally refers to the Arena]. And now I'm setting sail and heading off to the land of the Deep And Meaningless again. And it's great fun."



At the time of Robert's Moment Of Illumination, the huge revival of interest in Led Zeppelin had already begun, fuelled by the band's somewhat chaotic reunion at Live Aid. And now, at a time when Zeppelin fever, spread by the likes of the Beasties, The Cult and The Mission, is epidemic and highly contagious, Plant is back with a new album, *Now And Zen*, which not only admits to the glorious past, but hugs it.

THE "OOOOH"S ARE BACK!

As someone who fondly remembers the vivid physical effects of Robert's "ooooh"s upon young ladyhood, I'm delighted to find them, after all this time, in excellent working order. But don't expect to hear any over-the-top screeching – that's a thing of the past.

"The primal scream effect was in the very, very early days, because I couldn't think of anything else to do," said Robert, tossing back the famous mane of tangly, long, blond hair. "To use any kind of vocal dynamic, it has to be an effect and it has to be in sympathy with what else is going on. You don't have to go wailing all over the place. The Deep And Meaningless 'Spinal Tap' scream always heralds a quick run to the button on the radio and a quick 'off'."

Jimmy Page is back!

WELL, HE'S ON two tracks: the current single, a moody song called "Heaven Knows"; and the perky, eccentric "Tall Cool One". The arrival of Page to play his guitar parts so excited the normally celebrity-weary studio staff that they ended up climbing over each others' heads to watch the master at work.

"His persona, his imagery, his myth, his mystique are intact," said Robert. "He retains the mystique that Led Zeppelin as a unit had, simply because he's not doing what I'm doing now. Jimmy doesn't talk to anybody. To have mystique, you do… fuck all. Why do you think Led Zeppelin was so much of an intangible thing? We were completely out of the media's reach. Occasionally Nick Kent staggered his way across the ocean to review a concert, but it was occasionally. We never courted the media. Nowadays, in certain quarters, people say, 'Plant's OK, he talks.' I'm part of the machine. I'm doing what I'm doing now because I'm promoting my record. Would Jimmy Page ever agree to being cornered by Simon Bates?"

Jimmy Page is currently working on new material to which Robert Plant has contributed the words and main melody line of a song called "The Only One".

The songs may not remain the same, but they're back!

WHEN PLANT GOES out on tour shortly – "It begins on Friday next in Camelot, somewhere on the M25" – he intends to include a handful of Led Zeppelin songs in the set, something he always insisted would never happen.

"It's time to eat some of my words," he nodded, remaining vague about which numbers he might resurrect and remarking only that "I won't keep the obvious ones in". He did, however, take on "Rock And Roll", "The Lemon Song" and "Trampled Underfoot" at a recent "secret" gig.

The riffs are back!

IN THE MOST significant reference of all to his membership of Zeppelin, Robert has included on his new album samples of some of their riffs.

"Zeppelin samples have been used quite regularly in the last two or three years," he said. "I just think that if Rick Rubin can do it rather poorly and quite obviously and seriously, by the sound of it, like some American jackdaw, then I might as well do it myself. There's nothing wrong with theft, there's nothing new under the sun, but when the riff is the only thing – on 'She's Crafty', for example – you've gotta be being cynical, I guess. But it served its purpose. It was 'rich boys play dirty'.

"Jimmy Page didn't know I was going to do any sampling on my own album. He didn't hear what we'd done until the end, and he just raised an eyebrow and looked quizzically at me. The idea of lifting off our own records – it's taking the piss really, isn't it? You draw on photographs sometimes, and you cut up boxes of

"I like to maintain some dignity and individuality": Plant reaches solo album four

ILPO MUSTO / REX FEATURES

chocolates and make models out of them. If you lift something off a record, it's neither here nor there. I'm sure Jimmy sees the point. The point is that those are some of the finest and toughest riffs that ever were, and in their original form they were masterpieces. They are Jimmy Page riffs, not mine, so maybe he was entitled to form an invisible question mark."

Robert Plant's on a bit of a health kick just now. He hasn't smoked a cigarette in six months, and he gave up the bottle on New Year's Day.

"I wanted to concentrate on my sexual prowess," he explained. "I thought one or two things might be hampering it. I thought it might go somewhere, like disappear altogether. I saw pictures of Mick Jagger jogging and I knew that something was going on. I spoke to my body and it said, 'Jagger's got it right.' I've drunk lots in the past, but never really to great excesses. I've never been seen staggering around – or if I have, then obviously I can't remember! But at the moment there's no fags, no drugs, no drink. Just a barbed tongue."

It's a barbed tongue which is particularly scathing about Plant's own contemporaries, the people he collectively dismisses as "Deep Sabbath". I wondered what he'd have to say about the younger, Zeppelin-influenced crop of rock bands. The Cult, for instance.

"I like The Cult," he responded. "They're good guys, you know. It would be pretty futile me criticising them for what they lean on, having had so many love affairs myself with Willie Dixon and Muddy Waters and so on. Everybody leans somewhere or other. If The Cult were stopping me selling records or continuing to build the remarkably strange audience that I do, I would be down on them like Wolverhampton Wanderers Subway Army."

In the past 10 years, Led Zeppelin, leading dinosaurs on the punk rock hit list, have, through no efforts of their own, become everybody's darlings, with even arch enemy John Lydon confessing his interest and asking Robert Plant for the lyric to "Kashmir".

"It was an about-turn for him really," agreed Robert. "I like him. I think he's great. He's Max Bygraves with odd suits, isn't he? He's disturbing enough to warrant being heard, but I don't care what the fuck he thinks about Led Zeppelin".

Or what he used to think…

"When I was a kid, it was always pretty hip to knock everything that was successful. I'd knock The Beatles, but I wouldn't knock The Merseybeats. Yet The Beatles were stunning. I soon grew up and kept my mouth shut."

Plant believes that many of the punk rockers who claimed to hate Led Zeppelin had no clear idea of what it was they were slagging off, and that those same people, on subsequent tours of Europe and America where Zeppelin records are still comprehensively played on the radio, became obliged, through familiarity with the music, to modify their opinions.

"If anybody ever thought that Led Zeppelin was like Deep Purple, it must have been a hell of a shock for them to hear *Physical Graffiti* or *Presence* or *In Through The Out Door*. If you think Led Zeppelin is some old hippy band, you don't know what it was about. If you listen, if you forget about the Tolkienesque, whingeing lyrics, you can hear the texture and the scope of what it was."

How do you feel about The Mission, Robert?

"I think that when the first record company dinner is being digested by the starving musician, he realises there are greater things in life than gobbing at the crowd and asking God for mercy. Suddenly the idea of doing well doesn't seem so bad, and if you have to listen to *Led Zeppelin III* to do OK, then I must say that I wear black all the time now. They've joined my club. I wonder if I can join theirs? I wonder if I'd have to ask John Paul Jones for membership? That would be the greatest irony."

Former Led Zeppelin bassist John Paul Jones is, of course, the man behind the controls on the new Mission album, a tape of which just happened to be close to my person on the day of the interview.

Plant listened to the extremely "Kashmir"-sounding "Tower Of Strength", beaming, visibly impressed.

"Yeah, he's made 'em into a band," he enthused. "Sounds great, the rhythmic quality of it, and he [Wayne Hussey] sounds like he's enjoying singing the thing a bit more. Post-gothdom. Never mind whether it sounds a bit like 'Kashmir' – it's a bit like 'Friends', actually. The thing that pleases me most is that it's given Jonesy some sense of purpose. I'm really pleased for John that he's found some young boys to play with again…"

Robert Plant, on the day we met, seemed like the most contented individual in the world, a man whose only worry is "whether the next Let's Active album will be as good as the one before", a man bursting with confidence in his own LP (his favourite since *Physical Graffiti*) and his band, which was born of the collaboration between Robert and keyboardist Phil Johnstone, the co-author, with partner Dave Barrett, of "Heaven Knows".

"We've made a really fine record," said Plant, proudly. "It's better than anything I could've hoped to put my name to. We were trying to craft something which should maintain parts of my trademark, my style, but at the same time should be dotted with the personality of the people who played on it, rather than it just being Robert Plant standing there like some lone Skytrooper surrounded by Whitesnake throw-offs."

Oh-oh. That mischievous barbed tongue again.

"A lot of people I know used to work for David Coverdale…"

I've always been a Plant rather than a Page person myself, ever since the moment I first heard "Heartbreaker" stop dead and Robert leap headlong into that wonderful line: "*With a purple umbrella and a 50 cent hat…*" But with the exception of *Pictures At Eleven*, his solo work has brought me more disappointment than enjoyment, which is why it's doubly cheering that in my brief acquaintance with the variety and the wit (and the "*ooooh*"s) of *Now And Zen*, it's growing!

Plant's own enthusiasm is such that I wouldn't be inclined to put any money on the current batch of "Zeppelin to reform" rumours, especially when you consider Page's notorious, um, unreliability.

"I became good friends with John Paul Jones because I could never get the other two up," cracked Plant. "If we ever did reform, we'd have to play three different towns on the same night just to prove what we really are in everybody's imaginations. As this is pretty impossible, we may have to shelve it until at least September. Snigger."

While it's true that Led Zeppelin always did loom larger than life in the fanciful imagination of the public, their legend reached truly awesome proportions with the publication of the *Hammer Of The Gods* book, filled as it was with scandalous revelations from an ex-member of the entourage.

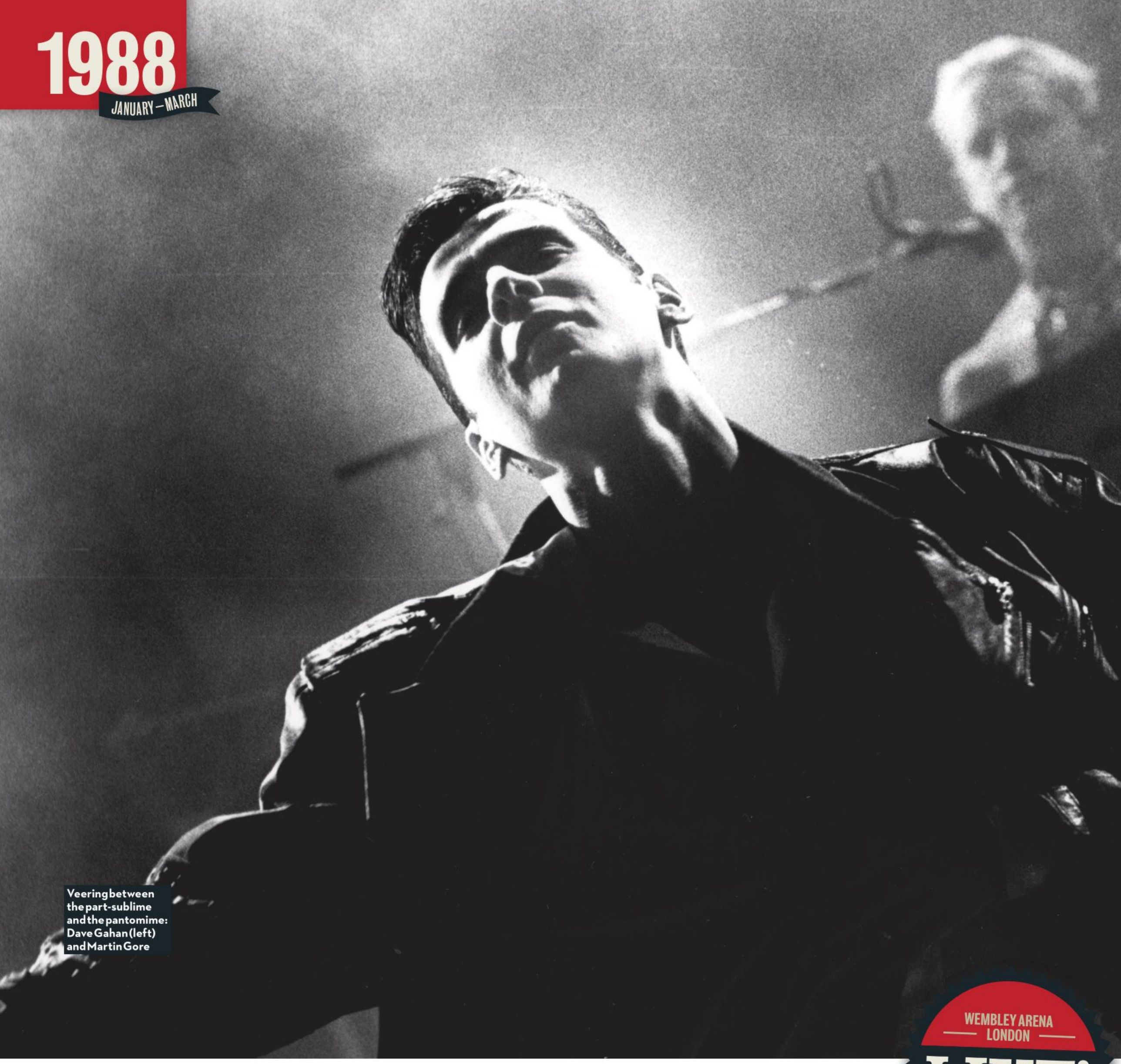
"He sold his yarns to satisfy his own cravings," commented Plant. "His fables are a little distorted, really. I think he must've travelled with another band, probably The New Christy Minstrels. He's very well now, though. I bear him no malice and I'm pleased to see him when I see him. He's made his peace with Jimmy. I think he does feel embarrassed. If I ever start drinking alcohol again, he can buy me a drink and we'll call it quits."

It only remained to find out what role Robert Plant can now see for himself in the present scheme of things.

"I'm constantly searching to make that ultimate piece of music," he decided. "The world is convinced it was made in 1972 and that it went on for 12 minutes. The mood of music like 'Kashmir' and 'Achilles' Last Stand', 'Slow Dancer' and now 'Heaven Knows' is what I pursue, catching that drama. I like to maintain some dignity and individuality. I don't consider that I'm part of the heavy metal gang, or the hard rock gang, or the anything gang. I haven't quite passed enough commercial examinations to join the old pals act yet. And if I play my cards right, I'll never get asked." *Carol Clerk* •

"I'm constantly searching to make that ultimate piece of music"

THE SONG REMAINS THE same



Veering between the part-sublime and the pantomime: Dave Gahan (left) and Martin Gore

WEMBLEY ARENA
LONDON
LIVE!
JANUARY 11

Fisher-Price electro-funk

NME JUN 23 Depeche Mode, every suburbanite's synth-goth favourites, impress even the doubters.

MIKE MORTON

FLIPPIN' BLIMEY 'ECK... Mode mania! A sea of sensibly shod suburbanites sway and swoon, screech and scream. Six thousand gold-banded wrists wave in formation, 12,000 mascaraed eyes strain towards a stage full of matt-black hardware, a million decibels of womanly lung power assault the senses. These people are bloody hysterical. And so, tonight, are Depeche Mode...

We're halfway through the evening's festivities and only the threat of a female lynch mob is keeping my face straight as our heroes take it in turns to reveal previously unsuspected depths of utter prattishness...

First Dave Gahan treats us to his fabby new Essex Sex God act; we marvel at his totally convincing pelvic thrust (complete with authentic, permanently erect, radio-mic accessory); we gape at his mastery of the Freddie-Mercury-Ain't-Piles-Murder?' stance; and we stare gobsmacked as (combining the contortions of an arthritic battery hen, a B-movie stripper and Mick Jagger's grandma) he unveils the second-worst dance routine on earth.

The worst, of course, belongs to his colleague Fletch, who idles his evening away in bouts of sheepish amazement at the mayhem unfolding before him, and effortless demonstrations of his patented Crimes Against Choreography...

But most wondrous of all is the sight of Martin Gore as he agonises through those of his hilariously doomy poor-little-pervert numbers that even the galloping Gahan is too embarrassed to sing. Plastered in panstick and adorned only in studded lederhosen and white popsox, he is a nightmare of knees, nipples and nonsense, he is Conan The Librarian, he is (Action) Man At S&M, he is an obvious, if loveable, brain-donor...

Adorned in studded lederhosen, Martin Gore is a nightmare of knees, nipples and nonsense

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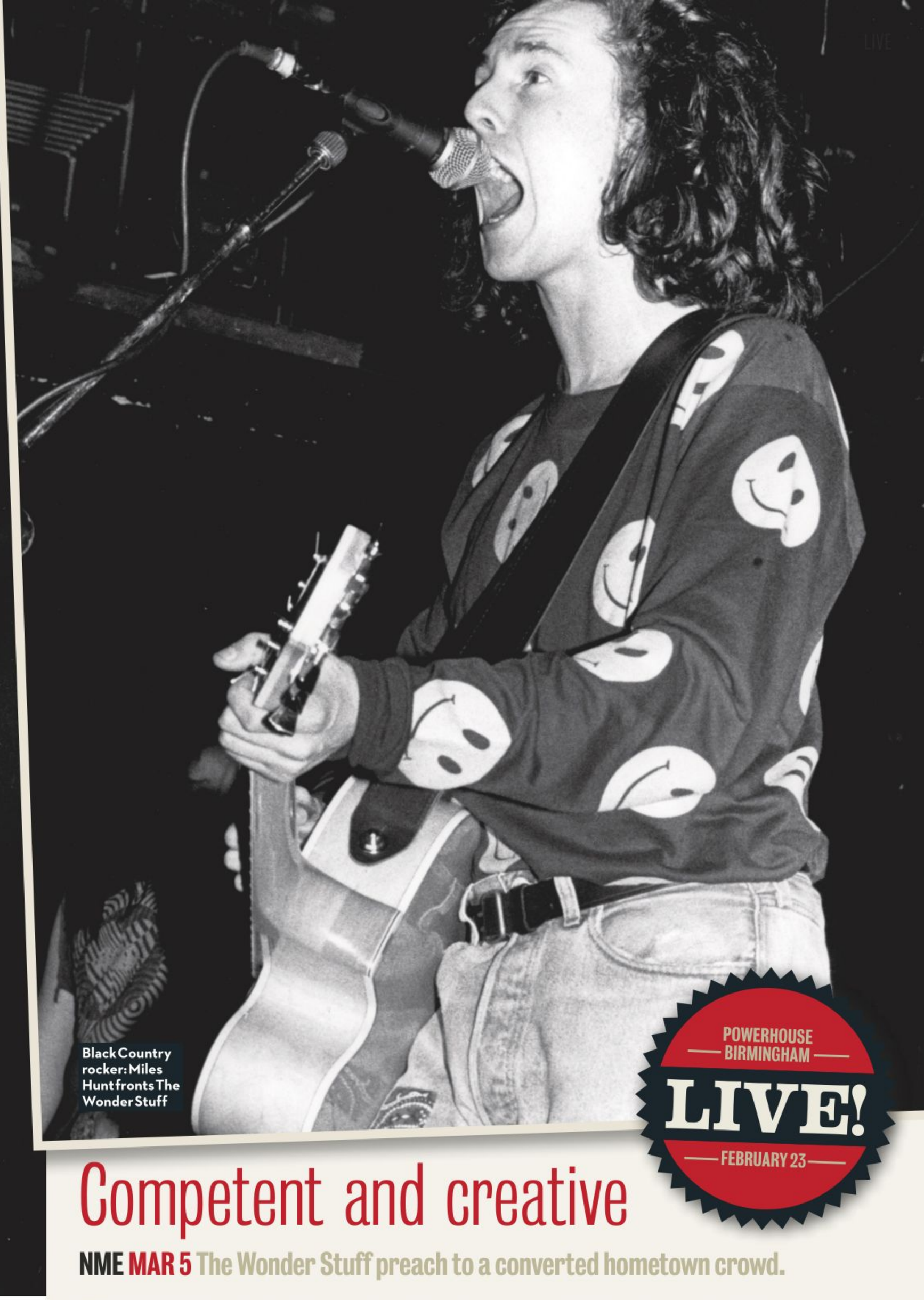
And yet, when these lads do return from their imaginary TV slots (Dave on *Seaside Special*, Fletch on *The Price Is Right* and Martin on his own *Arena* two-parter) and slip into the tried and tested groove of their Fisher-Price electo-funk, they are quite brilliant. In these flashes the likes of the current single and "People Are People" become Transformers, jet-heeled pop, armour-plated and invincible. And "Black Celebration" is breathtaking, impacting like a Scargill rant in an episode of *Antiques Roadshow*, hammering even the most fundamentalist screamers into slack-jawed dumb awe...

Veering crazily, then, between the part-sublime and the pantomime, Depeche Mode continue to confuse and frustrate my simple brain. That said, as soon as I got out of the range of the screamers I found myself laughing like a drain (how does a drain laugh, exactly?). And for a gig at Wembley's hateful barn, I call that a result. *Danny Kelly*



Black Country rocker: Miles Hunt fronts The Wonder Stuff

POWERHOUSE BIRMINGHAM
LIVE!
FEBRUARY 23

Competent and creative

NME MAR 5 The Wonder Stuff preach to a converted hometown crowd.

THIS IS NOT a rock gig – it's a tour back into the savage rePOPlic where striped shirts, crumpled hair, wet pumps and tight trousers rule the body and guitar riffs slash as often as drunken tramps.

Yo! It's The Wonder Stuff in their hometown, at the Powerhouse, and they're busy insulting the cleanest All About Eve audience you'll ever come across. So to speak. Not that the evil Eve are really tonight's main attraction, because if there's a 1,000-strong crowd here, half of them are wearing Wonder Stuff shirts, and most of them know every word Miles Hunt, the vocalist, sings.

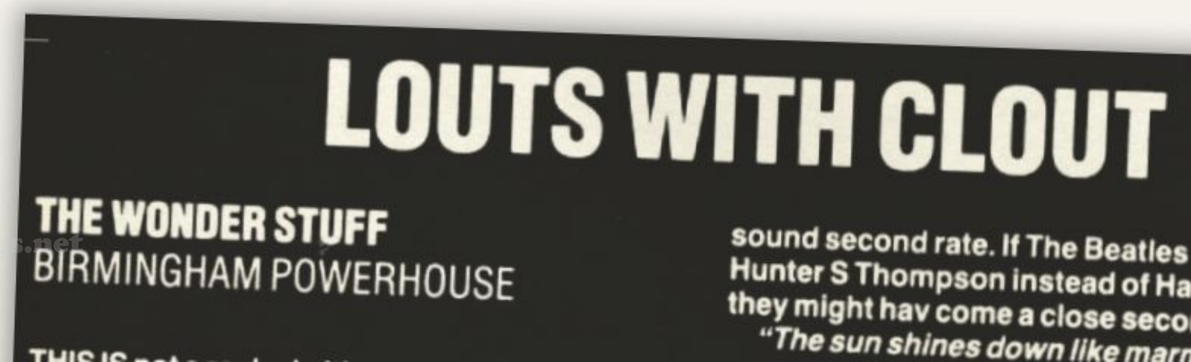
Let's make this clear now, The Wonder Stuff are fantastic, their confidence makes Emily Lloyd appear as cool as a curry, and their music makes even the great Julian Cope sound second rate. If The Beatles had dug Hunter S Thompson instead of Harold Wilson, they might have come a close second.

"*The sun shines down like marmalade and covers us like glue,*" might not be a stunning line when singled out, but when manhandled amidst the loutish but infectious sound of "Ruby Horse" it positively gleams. Starting with the unavoidable pop thump of last year's addictive Feargalism "Unbearable", which had every foot in the house pounding the floor, The Wonder Stuff gave us a roll call of future hits – "Wish Away", "Poison" and "Merry Go Round", all bettering every pop song apart from The Primitives' "Crash" in this week's Top 40.

"It's Yer Money I'm After Baby" was proof in itself that The Wonder Stuff are far more competent and creative than the rest of pop's optimistic two-minute spunkers. They're louts with clout and nowt taken out, and they're pretty good for synchronised headbanging, too.

James Brown

ANNE COFFEY



“A mental hard-on”

Already, the RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS are a band misunderstood. Pro-sex, but not sexism, the generally naked Californians are governed by fun. “Our music is like a bowel movement,” says singer Antoine “The Swan” Kiedis. “It comes out of us very naturally.”

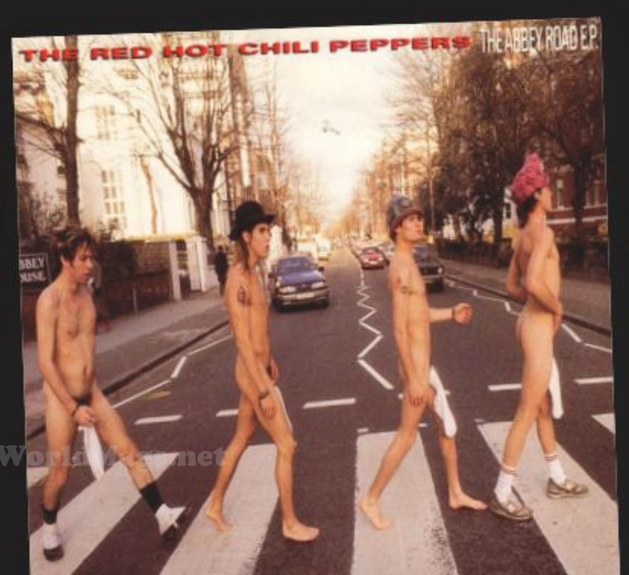
— MELODY MAKER MARCH 12 —

IT’S IRONIC BUT true. While we’ve all been celebrating the reawakening of pop’s diffracted genius we’ve allowed its fall into the grasp of the censor to slip by. While its head and heart are still free to flutter around the firmament, its nether regions are unceremoniously but firmly tied down lest they pop up and embarrass its increasingly cosseted audience. As a journalist, it’s becoming increasingly difficult to represent bands as they truly are. By the time you read this, much of it will have already been cut for fear of sanctions from the newsstands.

As every other entertainment industry is allowed to probe the boundaries of its possibilities, pop cowers in the corner, ashamed of its body and trying desperately to forget that it once celebrated that thing in-between its legs. But enough is enough, the Red Hot Chili Peppers have sat long enough, have had enough of the pratting or rather not pratting around and are charging full tilt and full frontal at the new morality with everything they hold dear swinging in front of them as they run.

The Red Hot Chili Peppers are putting the three most important letters back into FUNK, taking the piss out of the idiots who forgot what it was for in the first place and are being censored left right and centre because of it. »

PAUL BERGEN / GETTY



"As long as the elastic's good you're OK": Anthony Kiedis socks it to 'em at Eindhoven Effenaar in the Netherlands, February 18, 1988

The Red Hot Chili Peppers in 1988: (l–r) Jack Irons, Flea, Anthony Kiedis and Hillel Slovak

"From our viewpoint, it's impossible to ignore the correlation between music and sex, because being so incredibly rhythmic as it is, it's very deeply correlated to sex and the rhythm of sex, and the rhythm of your heart pounding and intercourse motions and just the way it makes you feel when you hear it. We try to make our music give you an erection."

The Chili Peppers' bassist Flea, star of Penelope Spheeris' *Suburbia* and a slightly unnerving muscular dwarf with an apprentice skinhead haircut, takes a gargantuan toke backstage at the Paris Rex Club and blows smoke rings into the atmosphere.

"In terms of the sexist interpretation," he continues "that's really shallow. The fact that we have songs like 'Party On Your Pussy' [changed to "Special Secret Song" after complaints from EMI] is meant as an endearing compliment to the female race, who we treat as total equals and who we love very much. There is no sexist attitude in this band.

"To me, the closest thing you can call it by conventional categorisation is hard-edged funk, but there again, to me it's too personal, there's not a tangible way to describe it. The thing is the sense of commitment to the groove. I have to give up all my other thoughts and just wail as hard as I humanly can.

"Today funk isn't very funky to me. It's just too clean. Funk should be dirty music; it's not pristine, it's gotta have that dirty grungy feel. It's not a crashing snare drum or a flashy bass drum pattern. When funk started, it was a dirty word and kids would hide their funk records 'cos their parents didn't wanna know about James Brown, 'cos that was like saying 'fuck'.

"A guy slaps a bass now and does supposed funk lick number 63 and disco drumbeat number seven and everybody calls it funk. Every time I play a gig they play this song called 'Pump Up The Volume' and they call that *funk*? That's not funk, man, that's a bunch of sequencers jacking off for androids – it's not for people who like to shake their ass and get down."

The Chili Peppers have hit their stride and aren't gonna be sidetracked by an accusation of boring old fartism. Singer Anthony "Antoine The Swan" Kiedis takes up the argument.

"The whole reason we started playing music is 'cos we loved making people feel certain ways, and our music is very heavily based on emotion and just the feel you get when you listen to it. The best way to describe our music is like a bowel movement, because it comes out of us very naturally and it'll always be like that. We do what we do and we do it as good as we can."

The Chili Peppers call themselves an organic anti-beatbox band. Others call them dated – an outmoded amalgamation of slap bass and slapstick, hard funk and hard rock. But then, others miss the point. The Chili Peppers are more than mere dancing fools. They're a primal instinct that's been largely tamed into impotence in modern pop. Others tease and tweak, but no one actually has a noisy multiple orgasm in the middle of each and every song. Antoine laughs at the notion but understands the sentiment.

"It's largely a philosophy of ours that we're very pro-humans, making emotional music for other humans to listen to. It's our belief that computer rap music is interesting to listen to, but it's impossible for a computer to translate the emotions that we find it necessary to translate. They don't have penises, they don't have hearts, they don't have souls and they can't play with any of those elements, and those are very strong elements in our music. It's about what we are, where we came from, our unity as friends and the chemistry of our four brains put together along with the fact we have an incredible drummer."

> "We're all very driven just to make people smile and be happy"

LIKE MOST CALIFORNIAN bands, the Chilis exhibit an insular, gang-like existence, but deeper than that they share an instinctive and almost tribal celebration of their own male sexuality, often resulting in shows of nudity. The resulting accusations of sexism are predictable, lazy and miles off the mark – nevertheless, there's no denying that in the Chili Peppers' world, the cock is king.

"I'll tell you a secret about 'Fight Like A Brave'," Jack laughs. "When I did the drum track for that song, these guys stood at the studio window and pulled their scrotums out and pressed them against the studio window. They gave me scrotes while I was playing to give me energy. That was the main inspiration for that song."

Does that happen often?

"No. But if we've been in the studio all day and we're having a hard time getting a take,

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we'll say, 'Testicles out!' and we'll get them out and it'll help us."

Antoine says their penchant for nudity goes way back to the early-'70s fad for streaking.

"We used to streak when we were kids. One night, Flea and myself were round my house and we got naked and painted ourselves with my mother's lipstick and took some eggs and we were gonna knock on this guy's door and throw eggs at him when he answered, but he wasn't in, so we ended up throwing them at some obscure old man walking down the street.

"Another time, when Flea and I had signed to EMI, they were having this big meeting with all the heads and we wanted to go in but they wouldn't let us, so we took off all our clothes and ran in naked and totally freaked them out."

"It all goes back to when we were young," Jack offers by way of explanation. "Did you ever have those dreams where you're walking round your high school in your underwear or naked and everyone else is not and you're going, 'Eeeeek!' I suppose everyone has these dreams when they're growing up. We're just turning them into reality. The sock thing was Antoine's idea. We used to play at this strip club in Hollywood and we wanted to upstage the girls, so we went back for the encore one night just wearing a sock each. I laughed so much I pissed in mine."

How do they stay on?

"Ball-power. As long as the elastic's good you're OK."

And if not…

"It hasn't happened yet."

Do you ever get hard-ons on stage?

"We probably would, but we move around too much," says Antoine. "It's more a mental hard-on."

The best thing about the Red Hot Chili Peppers is that they never stop to think about the consequences. Like Jack walking through UK immigration with a tit hat wobbling on his head, or Flea and Antoine's childhood sport of throwing themselves off Los Angeles apartments five storeys down into neighbours' swimming pools – they only stopped when the singer missed, hit the side and bounced screaming into the water with his back cracked in half. All this comes out in the music, and the motto seems to be if something's worth doing, it's worth doing in as extreme a manner as possible.

According to Flea, the Chilis are the aural equivalent of Dali's *Un Chien Andalou* – making music with nothing in mind but to enjoy themselves.

"We put as much into it every night as we can. Not very many bands do that. Some guys are just too old or take too many drugs to get on stage and put everything into it. Anyone who sees us that doesn't think we take our music seriously has gotta be crazy. I mean, to me, on that stage, if I have a bad show the only thing worse is a death or a heartbreak. You live with it and love it and nurture it, and when you do a good show it's great."

Not surprisingly when it came to choosing producers for their new LP, *The Uplift Mofo Party Plan*, someone else's idea of using Malcolm McLaren was given the boot straight away. As Flea explains, adopting a dreadful McLaren accent: "He was going, 'Right, 'ere's wot we do. Anthony, you're gonna be the star and you three can just sit at the back playing simple rock'n'roll. That was his concept and we did not wanna go for it.

"After that he went on for about two hours speaking about how important it is to get back to the roots of rock'n'roll 'cos nothing has ever been done differently, which we don't agree with. We think everything should be done differently and we think we're doing it differently. But he gave this really convincing speech about being in touch with the origins of it."

It was a ridiculous but well-presented argument, and on the strength of it McLaren lost himself the job.

"He made me faint, man," Flea exclaims. "I fucking fainted. I got real stoned and he just started talking and talking, we were in his room and my head started bobbing and then I fainted."

THE CHILI PEPPERS have had producer problems before, notably with Andy Gill on their debut LP. "To tell the truth," Flea explains, "it didn't work out as well as we thought it would. We really loved his earlier work and we wanted to go for a sound like that – not as sparse but with the same raw funkiness, but when we got together he wasn't into the same thing any more.

"We had a few clashes of opinion during our time together that were kind of monumental, and he tried to introduce a drum machine to our music, which was the opposite of whatever we had in mind. He thought it was necessary to get on the radio."

When it came to recording *Uplift…* with Michael Beinhorn, things were much better. Beinhorn spent a full month mixing the album and even went on tour with the band, thereby becoming aware that one of their most important assets was the pure physical energy.

"I hit my bass as hard as I can," says Flea. "I pound it till fingers bleed, and Michael understood that. It's hard to translate that onto vinyl, but he did that."

Beinhorn also captured the Chilis' inane but engaging sense of humour – a vital part of their stage show sorely missing from their two previous albums.

"I think as people individually we're all naturally driven very ferociously just to make people smile and be happy. We tend to base a lot of our day on making jokes and making funny faces to make people smile, and we focus that a little more intently in the songs we write."

"But that lady still didn't like it when you patted her on the head walking down the street," says Flea.

Have you ever gone too far?

"I've been slapped a few times," says Hillel, "just for being rude. But being slapped is fun."

The Chilis' understandably object to being called white dopes on funk. Leaving aside the inverted racism of the term, Flea reckons they're more psychedelic – in the true sense of the word. "When I think of psychedelia it always hits me as something that's more AAAAAAAAARGH! than 'Wow, man'," Antoine agrees.

"We've been a band now for five years and it just so happens that we're white, but that's irrelevant. Our music shouldn't be categorised in terms of colour, 'cos it really sets up barriers that are just negative. And so all these years we were inspired to play funk 'cos we grew up in America and we heard beautiful funk music, so we got into our own special funk groove and people began saying to us what are you doing playing that groove when you're white, and we just thought it was pure bullshit.

"People just tend to categorise us by colour with bands who we're nothing like other than the fact that we have the same colour skin. They may as well compare us to other bands who we don't sound like that are black."

In that way, the Chili Peppers are caught astride the same fence that eventually ripped the balls off Funkadelic back in the '70s. Flea agrees.

"I would make that same comparison myself. For a start, we're not the most commercial band in the world. The way radio is segregated, our music is too funky for the rock stations and too rocky for the black stations. Funkadelic had that same problem, especially in the early days when they were completely hard rock-funk."

Meanwhile, the Red Hot Chili Peppers hold the promise of the great night out. The guest list for their recent show at the Clarendon was a *Who's Who* of anything worthwhile that's around at the moment, and in Paris the Duranies, who were in town recording their new LP, threatened an appearance but in the end never showed. Jack was a trifle flattered but on the whole underwhelmed by the news.

"Well, it's a compliment for anyone to like us, but uh… Duran are the kind of band that people look at and say, 'Oh, I'd like to be like that.' They portray themselves in that light as if they're bigger than something that they really are.

"That really bothers me, 'cos I think that glamorisation of the music and entertainment business is ridiculous. It's totally bourgeois and stupid. It's crap for people to think that life is like a little motion picture – it isn't. We want our music to make people get off their butts and do something positive. That's what *The Uplift Mofo Party Plan* is all about." *Mat Smith* •

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“Down to earth... how life is”

With their heads screwed on, THE WEDDING PRESENT are writing songs of day-to-day romance and disappointment. “You might be totally in love,” says David Gedge, “but you’ve still got to make your cup of tea and go to work.”

— NME FEBRUARY 6 —

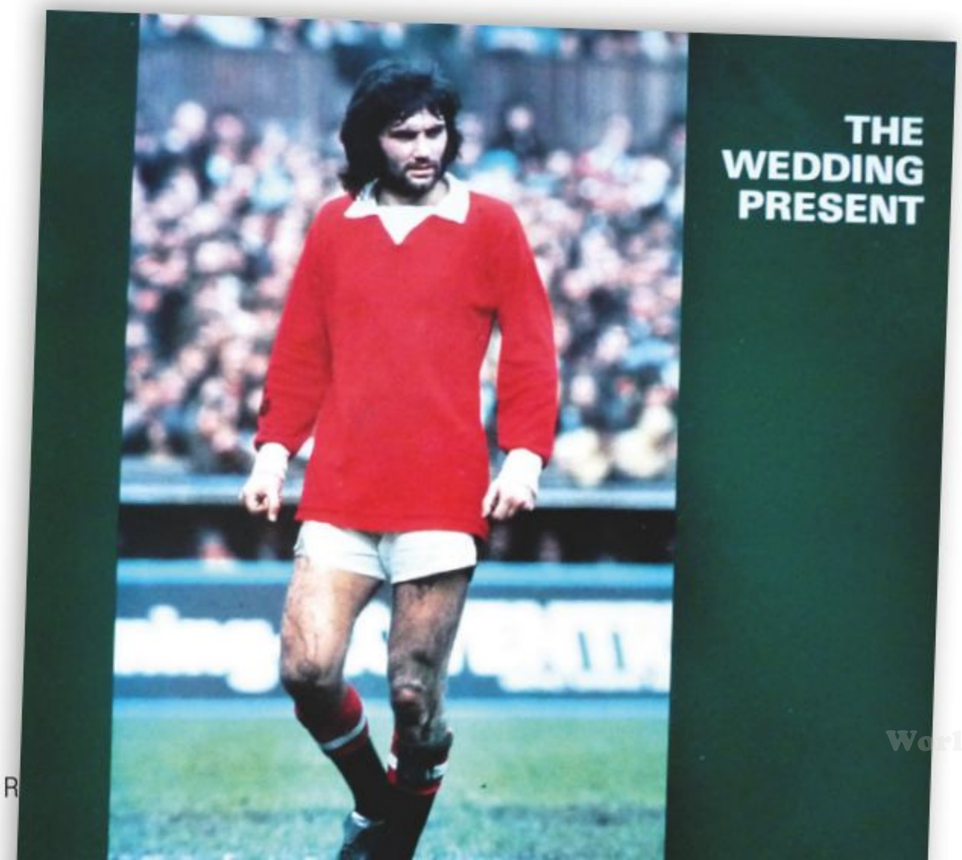
“WE AVOID GOING round saying, ‘We’re the greatest,’ not because we’re afraid to look prats in print, but because we genuinely think there’s something seriously wrong with people who do…”

“We’re not like Ian McCulloch, who can say, ‘My group is the best in the world and I’ve only got to point my finger and my fans will invade Parliament.’ That’s a complete laugh.

“I mean, you don’t get train drivers saying, ‘Me? I’m a fucking great train driver, one of the top four train drivers in Britain.’ And you don’t walk into a paper shop and get the woman behind the counter saying, ‘This is a brilliant fucking paper shop! Best paper shop in Yorkshire!’”

In a hotel room overlooking Leeds’ city-centre square, Dave Gedge, Keith Gregory and Grapper (aka Pete Solowka) – collectively TheWedding Present – are failing to do The ’80s Rock Interview, refusing to blow their own trumpet (probably against Musicians’ Union rules), badmouth their contemporaries, predict their forthcoming canonisation or outline advanced plans for world domination.

And it’s not as though they haven’t been encouraged. Before starting I’ve dutifully noted the ebullient sales of their debut LP (30,000 and rising in Britain alone), itemised their recent assault of various polls and John Peel’s Festive 50 (four of the Top 10 entries) and speculated as to how the demise of The Smiths and The Housemartins may have left the nation’s »



BLEDDYN BUTCHER

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January 26, 1988: The Wedding Present – (clockwise from top) David Gedge, Pete Solowka, Simon Smith and Keith Gregory – photographed in Clerkenwell Studios, London

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June 9, 1988: Peter Solowka (aka Grapper) and David Gedge on stage at The Fridge in Brixton, South London

discerning rock'n'roll hearts with rooms to let. To all this has been added the imminence of a spanking new single and a major tour, yet still The Wedding Present refuse to put out the flags.

Keith (the band's self-taught expert on the politics of interviews) responds to my disappointed frown.

"OK, if you just want us to say something quotable we'll admit that the LP's brilliant reviews made us really attractive to women and we've spent all the time since running round town copping off."

Great. And all true?

"'Course it's not true!!"

He's just about right, of course.

Many interviews are just lists of unprovable bullshit boasts, and in an age where the media voraciously strips our pop stars of every last screed of mystery, privacy and individuality, The Wedding Present are quite entitled (maybe even well advised) to have no part of any attempt to venerate them or to expose just what it is that currently secures them a place among British pop's (admittedly far from crowded) crown jewels.

I, however, can take no such fifth amendment. So…

All this and more

THE REALISATION OF The Wedding Present's full glory arrived in my life as a series of system-quake shocks…

Their second single, "Once More", was a mesmeric mesh of motorised melody, lashed by guitars played at a speed that beggared logic but was never allowed to unravel into mere mindless mosh. In its ferocious intensity, it blurred by like some musical holy war, a jangling jihad…

My first live sighting was where they flayed the senses, playing even more wrist-splinteringly fast, defying both breakdown and burn-out, this blitzkrieg was more eccentric than threatening, and simply hijacked attention…

And then there's this winter's debut LP, *George Best*, inside whose head-turning packaging lurked a revelation, Dave Gedge's lyrics. Somehow filtering through the music's uncompromised mph, they were found to be evocative, moving, clever and funny, describing a mazy world of tangled emotions through the use of disarmingly familiar, conversational, language.

My captured imagination was also finding those tiny idiosyncratic details that mock the slavish predictability of most modern pop, that mark The Wedding Present out as cheeky, subversive chancers, as something special…

Like their snook-cocking Peel session cover of Orange Juice's "Felicity", when that band were the critical kiss of death… Like their flirtation with the contradictory cultural icon that is George Best… Like the playful swipe at The Housemartins in the LP's run-off grooves, where its catalogue number, "Leeds 1", is followed by "Hull 0"… And like, most recently, the Peel session they used to unveil a startlingly new accomplishment, four Ukrainian instrumentals!

The mere combining of all these ingredients guarantees nothing, but in this case the mix – more magic than chemistry – was obviously, thrillingly, right and The Wedding Present its solid-gold outcome.

"Kevin Keegan wasn't fit to lace George Best's drinks"

"WE CAN'T UNDERSTAND it when we walk past record shops and see these sleeves which make you think, 'How could anyone put out their records looking like that?'"

The human bits of that alchemical equation are, however reluctantly, commenting on some of their strengths. Their terribly un-indie things, such as presentation and packaging, leads eventually to a discussion of their incredibly successful annexation of the name and image of George Best, a marketing coup by which Dave Gedge is now slightly embarrassed.

"I've had people ringing me up and saying what a brilliant business move it was, but at the time, of course, it wasn't like that. I just thought that *George Best* would be a great name for an LP.

"I think The Wedding Present is quite rebellious at times, reckless in the way we do things, and I feel there's some of that in George Best, too. He had a flawed career, yet everyone remembers him as a genius."

However casually proposed, the marriage of The Wedding Present and the Bestie boy was utterly inspired. It succeeded in attracting the required attention to the album, sure, but its effect went beyond mere novelty.

It worked – though the band themselves dislike any theorising on the subject – because the union of band and barfly was a perfectly fitting jigsaw of interlocking abundances and famines.

The Wedding Present are rich in all the things that George Best so glaringly lacked – dedication, discipline, team spirit, reliability – but, for all their powers, are never going to be overburdened with style, verve, magnetism or those fleeting flecks of genius with which the Irishman was so wastefully endowed.

Subconsciously identifying him as their spiritual opposite, The Wedding Present used Best to Polyfilla over their own deficiencies. It was a startling, almost vampire-like, transfusion of charisma that clinched the band's emergence, an unrepeatable flash of inspiration.

DAVID WILLIS

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Anyone can make a mistake

"OH GOD..." KEITH sighs enormously, "I wondered when we'd get round to the 'progression' question."

The criticism most frequently levelled at The Wedding Present is that, the Ukrainian adventure notwithstanding, their musical vistas are too narrow to ever allow change or development. The word "progress", I swear, never entered my head as I casually let slip that the new single's spearhead cut, "Nobody's Twisting Your Arm", is not appreciably different from what's gone before. What ensues is the nearest thing Dave Gedge ever gets to apoplexy.

"It's completely different," he splutters in his best are-you-mad? tone. "People who've heard it have made a point of saying that it's a bit of a change.

"'Nobody's Twisting Your Arm' is really slow, based on a bass riff, like The Fall or something. It's even got an accordion on it!"

In truth, "really slow" is a ludicrous exaggeration, but yes, there is an accordion in evidence (played, natch, every bit as fast as the guitars). There's also an expanded role for the sweeping vocals of Amelia from Talulah Gosh and signs of a slight production rethink, so honour is satisfied.

Not that there was ever really any dispute. Constant change for change's sake (the dreaded "progression") is a necessity only apparently requited of white rock musicians and Keith, for one, sees no earthly reason why The Wedding Present should alter. If they are one-dimensional, then they're only so in the same way that James Brown is one-dimensional...

Perfectly, definitely...

(Almost) close to the Gedge

"YOU SHOULD'VE LET Keith answer all the questions meant for me. You could've quoted him and said it was me. He's better at it..."

It's taken a while, but I finally got Dave Gedge on his own. He sits not quite comfortably opposite me, those dark, vaguely comical, handsome features atop a body whose hunched slump screams reticence.

Pop is so illiterate that you only need to be able to string together six vaguely English words to be acclaimed as a lyrical genius. In recent times, Costello, McAloon, Mark Smith, Morrissey, MacGowan and even Billy Bragg have received these dubious linguistic laurels. Because of *George Best*'s downpour of language – homely, naive, sarcastic, bitter, bewildered, wise but always determinedly everyday – David Lewis Gedge has now been pushed into that elite. At least he respects some of the company.

"I like Morrissey as a lyricist, and Mark E Smith, and, I suppose, Lou Reed when he was in The Velvet Underground. Morrissey came along and it was brilliant; nobody ever used words like him before. He always managed to avoid the worst excesses of rock cliche, and that's my main aim as well. I generally don't like lyricists who over-glamorise things. Those who are deliberately mystic also leave me cold."

A song like "A Million Miles" – in which the much repeated, love-struck line '*You're not like anyone I've ever met*' is added to, at the very last moment, with the rider '*at least not yet*' – suggests a cruel streak in Mr Gedge, hints that he's not the sweetheart he's often made out. Those impressions, he reckons, are false, but the line does illustrate one of his abiding concerns.

"That little bit at the end brings you down to earth, something I've always been interested in because that, essentially, is how life is. You meet someone and you might be totally in love – your life may be completely changed – but afterwards you've still got to get up in the morning, make your cup of tea and go to work or school or whatever."

The determination to keep the subjects of his songs firmly in touch with the ground is where Gedge's writing differs most obviously from that of Morrissey. Both use language you'd hear in your local laundrette, lounge bar or living room, but Morrissey's aim (as in, say, "There Is A Light That Never Goes Out") is to create an unrealistically heightened, almost melodramatic, swirl of emotion; Gedge's is the opposite.

Experiencing his songs is like overhearing one side of a telephone conversation or catching edited highlights of an argument, a courtship, a whole relationship even, or reading another person's mind. Their carefully tended ordinariness means that just about everybody can connect with them, an accessibility deepened by the fact that they are all basically concerned with just one subject.

"Yes... love," Gedge confirms unapologetically. "Falling in love, falling out of love, being jealous, hating somebody. It's about ordinary people in an ordinary world, and the most special thing that can happen to anybody is to fall in love, and the worst is to fall out of love. You can be the prime minister or a dustbin man and it's still the most important thing in the world. It's the only thing that moves humanity forward, I think. What else is there to write about? Other subjects appear frivolous by comparison.

"I think I've got an unhealthy fascination with the way people think. At any given point, you will have your thoughts about a relationship, but the most important thing is what another, or others, think about it.

"I imagine looking through a window at two people, falling in love, or falling out, and I'm just dying to know what's going on..."

The extent, indeed, to which Gedge's songs eschew all other subject matters or inputs is almost, at times, eerie. There's none of the things that commonly seep into a lyricist's scribblings, no religion, no (obvious) politics, no literary references, no cinematic echoes, nothing.

"Even Morrissey," Gedge concurs, "is actually weighed down with those things. It gets to the point where it becomes meaningless, like name-dropping.

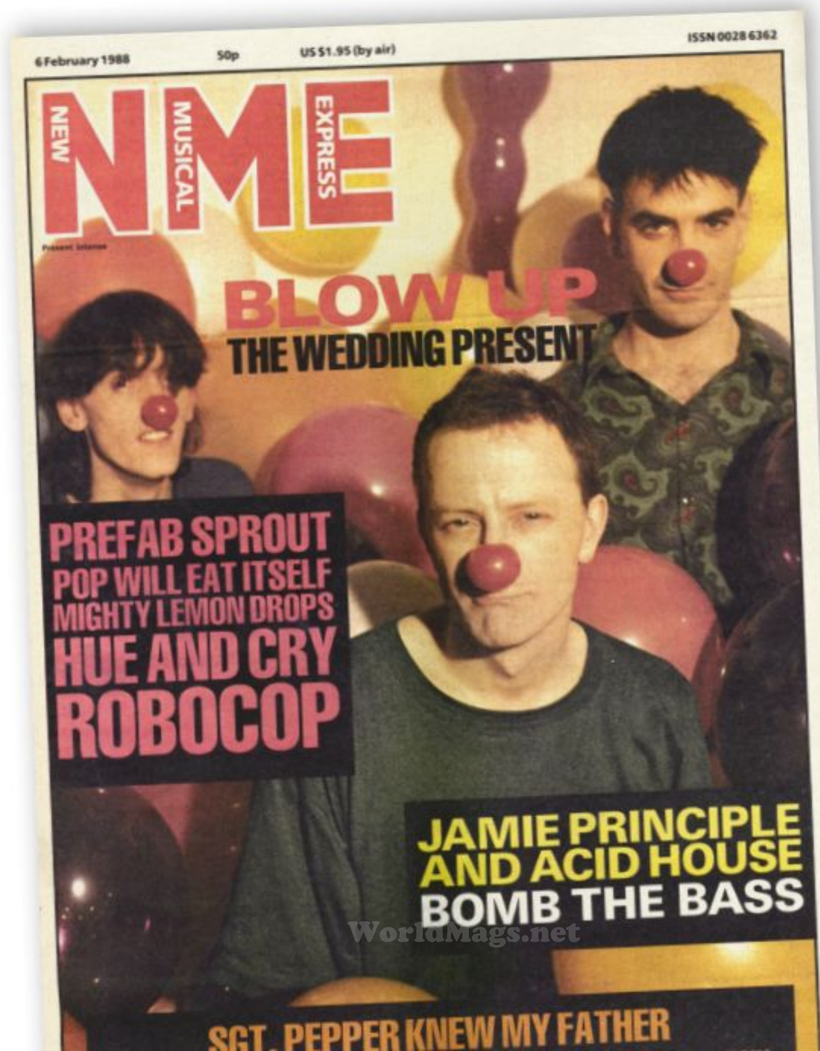
"I've never been interested in religion; it always seemed a bit too grim somehow. I've tended to avoid it in the same way that I've avoided football... I've always been inclined to be less interested in the news headlines – wars and the like – and really fascinated by item number 10 where someone's shot someone because they've been betrayed at a disco or something."

A final question, before Keith breaks the door down. Are you in love with The Wedding Present?

"Oh absolutely and completely," Gedge coos from behind a sheepish grin, "there's hardly a moment in the day when I'm not thinking about it. I suppose I'm a bit embarrassed about that, but... if you'd have asked me that question before we became quite big, it would've looked quite daft. I'll not be in this group forever, so I feel I must put in as much as I can into it while it's happening. It's like a compulsion, because you're scared you'll never do anything as important again.

"I'm obsessive about it now. It's like I'm half mad about the control we've got. I want it to continue... It drives me on."

> "I've got an unhealthy fascination with the way people think"



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Last orders

AT LAST! A flash of passion about the band, from the band...

At last! A spark of passion for The Wedding Present to match my own...

Finally! A blast of passion to help confirm that The Wedding Present, whether they like it or not, are one of the few vibrant, realistic alternatives to the sexless, soulless, shameless, mindless, pointless SAWdust we have endlessly shoved into our ears. An alternative, furthermore, that's tough enough, smart enough, single-minded and multi-talented enough to avoid being sucked into the sickly quagmire that claims so many of those who purport (half-heartedly) to kick against the pricks.

I was going to end by saying that 1988 is the year that will see The Wedding Present become a great group, but that's not true. They are already a great group. *Danny Kelly* •

"Nothing beats volume"

The extraordinary PIXIES have released the excellent *Surfer Rosa*, made with Steve Albini, formerly of Big Black. "He has this exhaustive knowledge of gay culture," they recall. "He told us about stuff like 'felching' and 'gerbilling'."

— MELODY MAKER MARCH 19 —

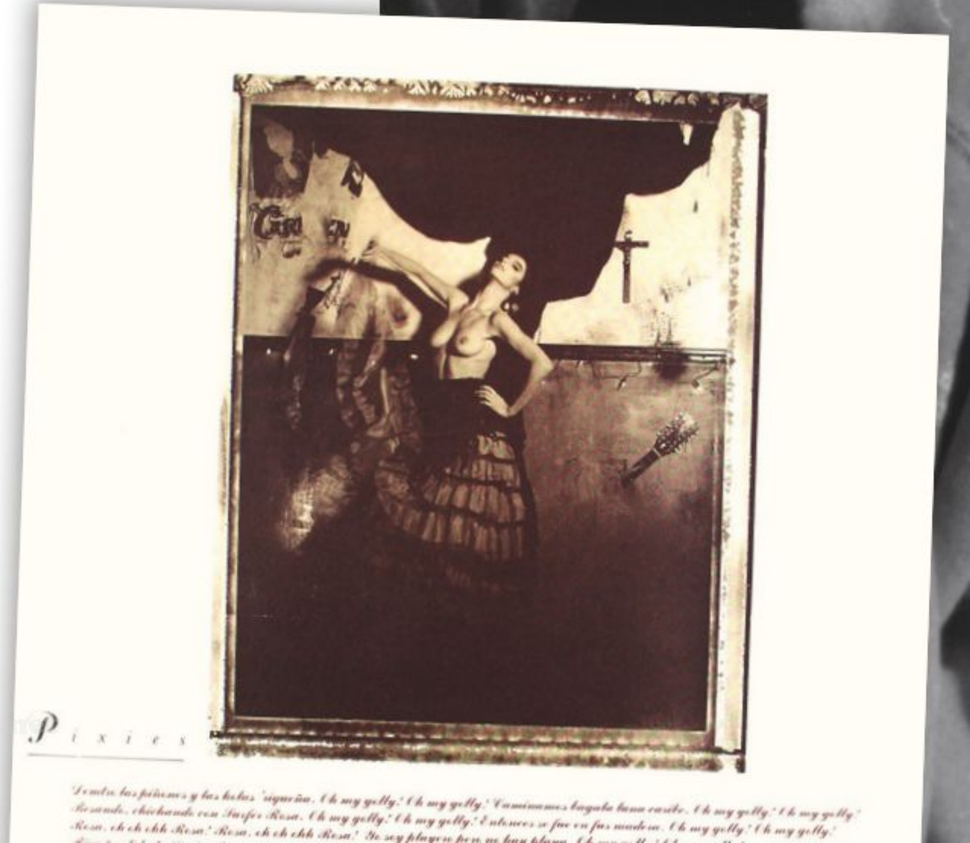
THE HOLLERING IS all. The Pixies are what's left when all the frustrations and absences that once prompted rock'n'roll into being have faded away or been catered for, and all that remains is the urge to holler, shriek and whoop it up for the arbitrary, unnegotiable hell of it. They're a poltergeist whose restlessness can never be pacified, the ghost of rock'n'roll. They throb with an obscure randiness it's difficult to imagine what would ever satisfy. A Pixies song is that primal, that post-post-modern.

The Pixies are about… no, the Pixies plain *are* the disfigurement and degradation of language. A Pixies song consists of gnashing, obscure imprecations, rabid interjections, palsied reveries, and the occasional lurch into lucidity: "*You're so pretty when you're unfaithful to me.*" Like their Boston neighbours and 4AD labelmates Throwing Muses, they provoke emotional responses you can't pin down: is that seven feelings at once, or a new, as yet unnamed emotion? They run strange gamuts and achieve peculiar juxtapositions of feeling, one minute haggard, the next luscious. What's happening?

An idle glance and you'd take them for a garage group. But this garage is like the Tardis: there's a supernatural amount of space in this rough-hewn, scrapping sound, a wilderness across which Pixies songs careen like tearaway mustangs or stampeded wagons shedding everything but their chassis. Along with space, there's a deformed sister to conventional pop geometry.

It's as though the acid-crypt punkadelia of bands like The Hombres or The Groupies has been possessed by the spirit of Dada. It's Ubu meets The Gun Club. They rock crooked. Rampaging ruins. "Wit", "playful", »

MILLICENT HARVEY



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"It's all a question of dynamics": the Pixies in 1988 – (l–r) Joey Santiago, Black Francis, Kim Deal and Dave Lovering

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"quirky", "kooky" are all offensively paltry and misleading words to use in connection with the Pixies. It's altogether less suave, more spume-flecked than that. Spooked is a bit better.

Their new LP *Surfer Rosa* is a brilliant step-sideways from the more produced trajectory of their recording; it's not so much produced as abased by Steve Albini, the ex-Big Black. The sepulchral, impossibly foreboding "Break My Body", the deranged shriek-whine "*Uh-huhn, uh-huhn*" that kickstarts "Broken Face", the truly gargantuan, holy horny "Gigantic", the strange soaring and wilting guitars of "River Euphrates", "Where Is My Mind?" with its crass but genuinely eerie harmonies and its chorus recited in a strange alloy of rueful puzzlement and mild irritations as though Black Francis has simply mislaid his sentence somewhere around the house… All these and more have encouraged some pretty uncool behaviour in the privacy of this household recently.

WE MEET IN the well-heeled downtown Boston condo of Mrs John Murphy (aka Kim Deal, the bassist and sometime – more often, please! – singer, on tracks like "Gigantic") and her obliging husband. Trite as it may seem to some, what's initially intriguing is the disparity between these genial, unruffled people and such… ruffled music: regular Joey Santiago the (incredible) guitarist, David Lovering the drummer with his imminent marriage and his metal-detecting, and the placid centre of it all, chubby Black Francis, aka Charles, the rock'n'roll shaman.

Only Kim seems inhabited by the same hyperactive energies that dishevel the music, fidgeting, splendidly impulsive, possessed of that unself-consciousness that seem to characterise young Americans, where a thought no sooner enters the head than pops out the mouth.

Generally, mere transcription cannot do justice to the array of stresses, inflections, manic touches, weird characterisations in a Pixies (or Muses) conversation: the buggering of syntax, the jaywalking and lane changes within language, the abandonment into inarticulate noises and gestures that is more expressive than conventional eloquence. People have celebrated America as a non-verbal culture, and compared with someone like Green (where the voice is corseted and coerced by the precision of what's being said), what the Pixies/Muses do, in their music and in their conversation, is to liberate the sensuality, the breath, of the voice. What they want to "say" will come out, despite the resistance of language, like a geyser. Like talking in tongues.

So are the Pixies their own favourite band?

Charles: "I like it… but it doesn't move me enough yet."

What degree of impact are you looking to match?

"I like Iggy Pop a lot… If I can come up with something that powerful, especially the demo stuff, like 'I'm Sick Of You', then…"

Are the Pixies a natural unnaturalness, or was there a deliberate attempt to vandalise the convention? Did you choose to jettison symmetry, put in all these gashes and gaps?

"Well, you want to be different from other people, sure, so you throw in as many arbitrary things as possible. So instead of having the typical four-line verse, we'll only sing three lines. Or when we stop for a pause, we won't wait the usual eight beats, we'll go rest for 10 beats. Or on 'I've Been Tired', where a four-chord sequence would sound natural, we'll turn it into a three-chord sequence, make it trip over itself."

Like a locked groove.

"Yeah. It's kind of religious sounding."

Like a mantra.

"Yeah, kinda. It's all a question of dynamics. And we only do short songs, which makes things sound even more uneven."

Obviously with the lyrics, unlike either the confessional songwriter or the social commentator, you don't set out to say anything…

"Eighty per cent of its baloney, yeah. It's that T Rex thing of, 'If it sounds cool…' I write the songs by singing a whole bunch of syllables along with the chord progressions, and they become words. A bunch of five words might mean something, or stand for something. But the five words after it, or preceding it, sure as hell won't have anything to do with them."

FRANK SCHELLEKENS / GETTY

September 23, 1988: Black Francis fronts the Pixies at the Paradiso in Amsterdam

KRISTIN HERSH OPERATES in a similar way, but because her stuff is a stream of unconsciousness, of dream imagery, you can take it as being riddled with all kinds of meanings she didn't consciously place there, threads you can unravel and perhaps "read". Can your words be interpreted at all, or shouldn't they be?

"I guess they must have a root somewhere; often the songs are vaguely about something. Like that line '*Oh bury me far away, please*', it doesn't really mean anything, but it could mean the guy's despondent about being '*the son of incestuous union*'. Or like the whole Biblical thing of when the women were menstruating: 'Go outside the city walls and do your bleeding out there.'" (I have to say, the connection here eludes me, but this probably says more about the short-circuited synapses of this young visionary than he or I could ever "work out").

"I like David Lynch's movies, his attitude where you don't always explain everything, you just come up with stuff that looks good and sounds good, and you just go with it. And you can look back on it if you wanna."

Your approach, your thang, reminds me a bit of surrealist phonetic poetry…

"It's definitely arbitrary, about going with the immediate. I read this interview with Robyn Hitchcock – he talked about saying something without thinking about why you said it, and because it has a root inside you, it's much more real, true to you, than if you think and analyse everything. That made me a lot more confident about automatic writing, or whatever you want to call it."

It must be a fantastic release.

"Nothing beats volume… and lights… and drunken people."

Kim: "If I didn't personally have this release, I wonder what I'd do instead."

It sounds like it should be performed on stage with much loss of inhibition.

Charles: "We're not good enough players to ad lib like that. We're still kind of static on stage. Kim kind of twitches. Dave looks

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like your baby brother when you think he's dying, but he's just crapping his diapers."

Well, I suppose the trad gestures of dis-inhibition just look rehearsed anyway, maybe it's more electrifying and electrified to be rooted to the spot. What's Albini like to work with?

"He's like this brainiac, about six foot tall but only 80 pounds, always reading, always figuring out manuals to see how things work. He's into lo-tech, eight-track, he likes live, he hates overdubs."

Kim: "He hates vocals. We spent days and days on the guitars and drums, and did the vocals in one night. It's like he said: 'You're going to do vocals on that song? Well, if you really want to…' He said that it's the first time he's worked with people who can sing. He hated doing the '*ri-ri-ri*' harmonies on 'River Euphrates'."

Charles: "He's very extreme. It's either, 'That's great, that's genius' or 'That's pussy, that sucks'."

Joey: "Pussy or non-pussy, that was the studio jargon."

Kim: "Everything had to be full throttle. I wish there were more dynamics in it. Every song on the album is produced with the same non-effects, so there's not enough ear-variety."

Charles: "I like him because he likes LOUD. All the needles were on red. He totally overloaded the tape."

Joey: "He let me use my amp, which was cool. It's this country-jazz amp, which engineers don't like because it's real whiney."

John Murphy: "On 'Something About You' he put Charles' voice through a guitar, to make it sound all grisly."

Charles: "The thing about Albini is that he's so military macho, but he has this exhaustive knowledge of gay culture, so you wonder… He told us about stuff like 'felching' [unprintable, readers, sorry, but if you write enclosing an SAE…] and 'gerbilling'."

This involves the use of a "de-clawed, de-fanged, oiled" rodent for the purposes of pleasure. "But sometimes the tail breaks, and there are cases where people have to go to hospital…"

Charles: "The world is going to end, y'know…"

Dave: "He's part of this network of like minds who circulate videos among themselves, people like the Butthole Surfers. They're into gore… Albini has this video of a politician in Pennsylvania who went on a news conference and blew his brains out on air. And videos of people shooting eggs out of their ass, right across the room into another guy's mouth."

And why *Surfer Rosa*…?

Charles: "See, there's this nude flamenco dancer on the cover, and 4AD wanted to call the LP "Gigantic" after the song, but decided they couldn't because of the big breasts… People might have got the wrong ideas, so I had to come up with something else."

Something else is what he came up with. What's this underground that you and the Muses are deemed to be part of?

Kim: "See, I don't really think there's such a thing as the underground any more. In '81, '82, when the punk thing was really going over here, maybe there was. But now, if you're anything at all, you can get an independent record out, get a video together, maybe get it shown late night on MTV.

"The underground is overground now. Before, though, like with the Stray Cats, nobody in Ohio had ever heard of them, you couldn't get the records, they were never on the radio. I got hold of their stuff by trading cassettes, like they do in Russia. Same with James Blood Ulmer, Captain Sensible, all that stuff…"

"All that stuff" – it's interesting how the demarcations and taste hierarchies we have in Britain just don't hold in the States. The local commercial new-wave radio station plays Sinéad, Nitzer Ebb, Midnight Oil, Dukes Of Stratosphear, Godfathers, Love And Rockets; Mr and Mrs Murphy will introduce me to Aerosmith's back catalogue, but will flip when I play them The Sugarcubes; the Boston nightclub Axis will mix Cabaret Voltaire and Skinny Puppy with ghastly noo-wave monstrosities that sound like Belinda Carlisle covering the Comsats' "Independence Day"; Charles will enthuse about his Damned CDs. Everything's topsy turvy. What makes them most proud about being Pixies?

Kim: "OK, this is my own thing, but having lunched and dined with Steve Albini, that we respect human beings. I know that sounds queer, but listening to him rag and rag, he's so sure, and nobody can be that sure and not be an asshole. Nobody knows what's going on anyway, so how can he actually say, 'This song sucks', and when he says it he means it, that's The Truth. You *can't* say that.

"When he was ragging on people and cutting them down, that was a bad feeling. An old man and an old lady came in to the diner, and he'd go, 'They're stupid, they're old, they're dumb'; he doesn't even have to look at them, he knows it."

Charles: "I like the fact that none of us are rock'n'roll-type people, we're truly naive, so it's very pure. There's not a lot of thought."

The Pixies put a lot of thoughtlessness into their music.

David: "Just the fact that how we look, how we sound, and what our name is – nothing fits together at all, in any aspect."

Are you particularly interested in the uncanny or freaky?

Kim: "You mean do we have any stories? There's the cake lady. This girl follows the Muses wherever they play, and gives them this food she bakes for them. Cakes."

Any good?

"I guess so. They eat them. At first they were kinda scared. Every gig they play, she brings food. She was there last night, at the Brattle Theatre. A real Bertha. A plain, rather heavy-looking girl."

I saw her. She looks out of time, from the '50s. "Yeah, always that style."

Was the desire to escape the fate of your parents, a regular, stolid life, was that a beatnik impulse behind wanting to be in a rock band?

Charles: "You mean, trying to rebel against the *Leave It To Beaver*-ness of your family?"

Sorry?

"Do you know *Leave It To Beaver*? It's a TV show from the '50s, a comedy about the ideal, nuclear family, being an upstanding member of the community, 'Gee Dad, I didn't mean to knock her up', that kind of thing."

Dave: "Kids today have all these jokes based on the show, like 'How's your Beaver, Mrs Cleaver?', or what's the worst? Um, 'Ward, you were a little hard on the Beaver last night.' See, Ward is the father and Beaver is the little kid."

Charles: "I mean, yeah – both Joey and me went to college in order to be in bands. And we dropped out of college to make a go of it. I don't want to look back and think, 'Oh, I wish I'd been in a rock band instead of this.' At least have a go."

Do you think there are singular, definable feelings in your songs?

Charles: "Hmmm… if you're angry, you scream, I guess."

But it's not an anger directed at anyone or caused by anything specific.

"No, it's just for the pure satisfaction of screaming. Just the yyyooOOOOOWWWW!"

Do you think the music sounds druggy?

"I don't know. I don't do drugs. Do you think it does?"

It sounds kind of wired, vaguely trippy…

"There's a certain attitude that – although when you analyse it it's all baloney, just volume and entertainment – that 'Yeah, this is what I have to say, everyone else has what they want to say, but THIS is what I have to say. It doesn't make a lot of sense, but it's all I have, and this is it.'"

So it's like a preacher testifying?

"Sure. I've been kinda affected by the charismatic Pentecostal thing, which my family was into when I was a kid in California. I grew up exposed to a lot of preaching and righteous rage, and though I've rejected the content of all that, the style has kinda left an impression on me. It certainly left me fucked up, that's for sure."

Hence all the religious imagery. Was it a really strict sect?

"No, it was pretty American: all handclapping, heaven and hell and sin. It wasn't quiet, it wasn't Anglican. It was all 'RRRRRREPENT' and 'GOD'! I was 12 and religion came over my entire family. But it began to erode when I was about 17. No, it wasn't the influence of rock'n'roll that drew me away, I was always into rock. It wasn't forbidden; if anything they encouraged it."

The real High Priest of rock'n'roll, talking in tongues as he loves. The religion of the end of religion. And The Word was… the death of The Word.

Simon Reynolds •

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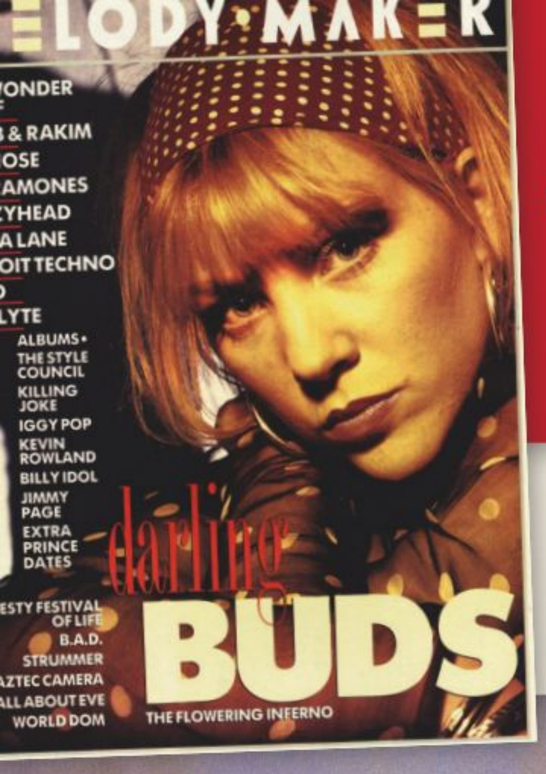

1988

APRIL – JUNE

SINÉAD O'CONNOR, LEONARD COHEN, KEVIN ROWLAND AND MORE

"A brilliant record"

NME MAY 7 *NME* does its bit for charity – with magnificent results!

WET WET WET and Billy Bragg's double-A-sided Childline charity single culled from *NME*'s fabulous *Sgt Pepper Knew My Father* album is in the shops now. Yes, we have given it numerous plugs over the last few weeks, but since we've just received this picture we thought we'd mention it again – and the record's great anyway.

In case you'd forgotten, it features Wet Wet Wet doing "With A Little Help From My Friends" and Mr Bragg, aided by the multi-talented Cara Tivey, reading "She's Leaving Home". It's out on the Childline label, which has been created especially for the occasion.

Esther Rantzen, chairman of Childline, said: "This is not only a brilliant record, but it is the most amazingly generous gift by some of the best singers and musicians, to children who are suffering and have only Childline to turn to. All the royalties from this single will go to Childline to pay for the phone calls from children in trouble or danger."

NME MAY 21

***NME* IS NUMBER** One – official! Our double-A-sided single featuring Wet Wet Wet and Billy Bragg has reached the top of the nation's official Gallup chart.

And Childline, the children-in-need charity, is guaranteed tens of thousands of pounds' profit from sales of the record, which is hurtling towards gold disc status.

The album from which both tracks are taken, *Sgt Pepper Knew My Father*, has also topped the 50,000 sales mark.

ADRIAN BOOT

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Being for the benefit of Childline: (l–r) Marti Pellow, Graeme Clark, Billy Bragg, Neil Mitchell and Tommy Cunningham

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Mick Jagger on stage in Sydney, September 1988

"People will take potshots"

MM JULY 19 NME May 7 Mick Jagger defends himself in court over solo recording – and corrects a judge.

MICK JAGGER WON a court battle in New York last week against a reggae musician who charged him with song-stealing. Patrick Alley, 37, a Bronx musician, claimed Jagger wrote his 1985 solo hit "Just Another Night" after hearing a song he had written himself.

Alley was suing Jagger and CBS Records for $6 million (£4m) in profits from the sales of the album *She's The Boss*, which featured the contentious track. After the jury returned their verdict at White Plains Federal Court, Jagger said: "My reputation is completely clean. If you are well known, people will take shots at you. I don't think the song is similar to mine at all."

He described the lawsuit as "pointless".

During the hearing, Jagger was confronted with a 1985 *Penthouse* magazine interview in which he was quoted as saying that early in his career he sometimes would "just copy things from other people".

Jagger told the court that he could not "guarantee the accuracy" of the quote.

Throughout the hearing, Alley argued that Jagger hadn't the talent to write a song of his own and so had stolen his song of the same name. Jagger denied the claim and told the court that he had written many songs by himself – but added that he and Keith Richards have a long-standing deal to share the "creativity credit" on records.

Patrick Alley argued that Jagger hadn't the talent to write a song of his own

The hearing gained some light touches when Jagger sang along to demo tapes played in front of the judge and jury. In another incident, he corrected US District Judge Gerard Goettel about a former case involving The Isley Brothers.

The judge was visibly pleased with himself when he recalled to Jagger the lines from what he said was a former Everly Brothers case: "*It's your thing/Do what you wanna do.*"

To which Jagger shot back: "That's not The Everly Brothers."

Realising his mistake, Judge Goettel blurted out the correction: "The Isley Brothers", and Jagger nodded affirmatively – all to the total confusion of the jury.

Juror Thomas Byrne said the case had changed his opinion of Jagger: "I have a totally different impression of him now. He came across as very intelligent and articulate."

Byrne added, however, that one of the jurors had disappeared into a toilet and "screamed her head off" after listening to repeated versions of the song over and over again.

BRENDAN BEIRNE / REX FEATURES, ANDREW CATLIN

REM: leaving IRS after five albums in five years

Time to move on

NME APR 19 REM sign to a major.

REM HAVE PARTED company with IRS, the label headed by Miles Copeland which first signed the group six years ago. They have signed a four-album worldwide deal with WEA, reputed to be worth in excess of $6 million. IRS matched the deal ($3 million for two albums), but were unable to hold on to the group. REM are expected to sign on the dotted line later this week.

A spokesman at the group's office in Athens, Georgia, said the group had just decided it was time to move on, having delivered five albums for IRS in as many years. But it is believed the main reason for the move, first forecast in *NME* last month, was to secure worldwide distribution on one label.

Long-awaited

NME MAY 7 Swans release a great Joy Division cover.

SWANS, WHO ARE set to release their long-awaited cover of Joy Division's "Love Will Tear Us Apart", fly into Britain this month for a short series of dates. The record, which was recorded in New York and produced by Swiss studio maestro and Wiseblood man Roli Mosimann, comes out on May 16. It will be available as a two-track seven-inch and a three-track 12-inch. The B-side of the latter includes new versions of "Trust Me" and "Our Love Lies", which first surfaced on the *Children Of God* album. Swans, who have a new drummer, Virgil Morefield, get into Gira at Newcastle Riverside (May 20), Manchester International 2 (21), and London Harlesden Mean Fiddler (22, 23 and 24).

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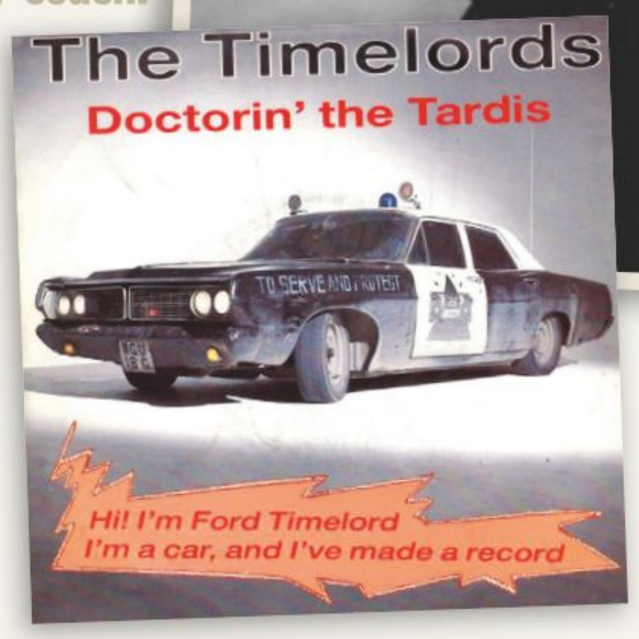
SHRINK RAP! TIMELORDS

MM JUN 11 The Timelords' car parks on the *Maker* couch.

The Timelords: Time Boy (aka Bill Drummond, left) and Lord Rock (Jimmy Cauty)



Mega pop stardom

It's my ambition to be a mega pop celebrity. I see myself as moving on from that to be a general all-round celebrity once the record has been a big hit. I think I fancy doing something like the *Wogan* show. How will I get the car in the chair? I suppose they'll just have to build a bigger one. Cars don't really sit down – we just let the air out of our tyres.

Gary Glitter

He's got to be one of the great pop stars of the last 15 years. Have I ever been to a drive-in Gary Glitter show? I've been at a couple. Actually, he wants to do some stuff with me. I wouldn't make Gary sit in the back seat, I'd pay him the compliment of allowing him to sit on the front one. That's probably the greatest compliment I could pay anyone.

Time travel

It's a strange thing. I do quite a lot of it, I must be honest about that. I don't want to talk about some of the things I've seen on my travels through galaxies, 'cos some of them are quite ugly. Mind you, I've seen some fairly ugly things in London. I was at Woodstock – you can actually see me in the film. Of course, I was a lot younger in those days. I didn't have so much rust. My best time was the early '60s. I used to take Brian Epstein around and I was there the day he signed The Beatles. I was a taxi in those days.

Swedish farmers

You've really hit a nerve now. My opinion of them plummeted the day I was shot at by one of them. It wasn't my fault. These two chaps, Lord Rockman and Time Boy, took me on a wild goose chase to Sweden to meet Abba and it ended up with me being shot at, running over mooses and God knows what else, very unpleasant. What does it feel like to hit a moose? I didn't feel it, but I don't think the moose was too happy about it.

Davros

The guy that created the Daleks, yeah? I'm a sworn enemy of the Daleks. I don't like what they stand for at all. If you watch the video for my new record you'll see me running them down.

The planet Gallifrey

Gallifrey, yeah that's OK. Actually, we had a bulletin from there yesterday morning and they're all dancing to the record up there. There's only a few good clubs there. I might open one up. I may call it Dagenham Dave's.

Gary Glitter

Traffic wardens

They're no problem to me. I just fuck off to another time zone. The present time zone is the best, without a doubt. I've never been so successful before. The '60s were OK, but there was a bit too much long hair and sweat about. A lot of strange things went on – on my back seat in the '60s.

Old age

I'm 726. I've been rejuvenated five times so far and I'm into my 20th year on this rejuvenation.

Caister soul weekenders

I've been twice. Most of my friends are Ford Cortinas or XR3 Escorts, and whenever there was a Caister soul weekender we'd all go down. But sitting in that car park all night was a bit naff.

The Model T

Wonderful cars. The Ford set-up in general is a pretty spectacular thing.

Dagenham

Dagenham is a wonderful place. When you were brought up for the first few years of your life chasing criminals around Detroit getting shot at and covered in crap, Dagenham becomes a real joy.

Dashboard hyperspace buttons

I've got two. I've got a hyperspace button and a hyper-hyperspace button – that takes you to Kensington.

The Justified Ancients Of Mu Mu

Between engagements, these two hooligans came along and bought me. They turned out to be none other than those two chaps. They're good lads, but when they started playing me the new stuff they were doing on my car cassette I thought it was time I showed them how it should be done. They haven't got much of a clue on the music front.

REX FEATURES (2)

"It's a shame"

NME APR 2 Rick Rubin parts company with the Beastie Boys.

THE BEASTIE BOYS may never work together again, according to the group's mentor and producer Rick Rubin. All three Beasties are currently working on individual projects and have already severed ties with Rubin.

"I don't know how happy those guys are being the Beastie Boys, I don't think they will ever make another record," Rubin told *NME* during an exclusive interview. "I certainly won't make any more records with them, because I don't think they want me to. I'm not going to twist their arms, but it's a shame because I had a lot of great ideas for their second LP."

Mike D is currently working as part of a new band called The Gentleman Dudes, and MCA has recorded solo material that is ready for release. Ad-Rock has an acting role in a new film by *Chariots Of Fire* director Hugh Hudson, which stars Donald Sutherland. *NME* first hinted at a Beasties split in January, following a backlash against the band in America and Ad-Rock's court appearance in Britain after a show in Liverpool. Rubin added: "The last time I saw any of the Beastie Boys was three or four months ago in Los Angeles. I spent one afternoon with Ad-Rock; he seemed a little unhappy with the overall picture and the way things were going. I think the reason he decided to do the movie was he saw it as a way of not having to deal with the group."

Beasties: working on individual projects

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April 24, 1988: James Brown at the New Orleans Jazz Festival

Fired three shots

NME APR 16 James Brown charged with attempted murder.

JAMES BROWN WAS charged with attempted murder last week after allegedly trying to kill his wife as she drove away after a row. Brown, 54, turned himself into South Carolina police after a warrant was issued for his arrest. He was held for several hours before being formally charged with assault with intent to murder and aggravated assault and battery.

He was released on $15,000 bail and is due to appear in court next month.

The Godfather – who has a previous conviction – denies all charges and claims: "I never laid a hand on her. She's just mad because I won't take her on my South American tour."

Police started pursuing Brown after his wife, 38-year-old Adrienne, told them about the couple's Easter weekend war at their home on Beech Island, South Carolina.

She said she was hiding from an angry Brown in a borrowed car when the singer fired three shots into the boot and another under the front headlight with a legally held pistol.

She drove off, only to return to the house on Easter Sunday night. Early the next morning Brown found her sleeping in the locked guest room. He smashed the door down and allegedly beat her on the arms, back and legs with an iron pipe.

Mrs Brown managed to drive herself to a local hospital, where she received emergency treatment for serious bruising. She then filed a warrant for her husband's arrest.

Local Aiken County sheriff Carrol Heath told *NME*: "He beat up on her real bad. She got severe bruises all over her."

After being charged, Brown told the press: "I can tell you now it's all over. She's not coming back to my house."

Mrs Brown plans to file for a legal separation. They have been married for eight years.

"I didn't do anything to provoke him, no sir," she said. "This is not the first time he has done this. He's knocked out all my teeth."

NME JUNE 11

JAMES BROWN IS divorcing his wife Adrienne. Brown, who is still facing charges of trying to kill her, said last week: "I'm going to divorce her. I love her very much, but I just want to be by myself. It will be done as soon as the papers go through."

NME JUNE 18

JAMES BROWN'S BRITISH concerts are definitely on after charges of attempted murder against him were dropped last week. Brown was facing charges of trying to kill his wife, Adrienne, assaulting a police officer and possessing a firearm illegally after a row at the singer's home in South Carolina in April.

Brown is alleged to have fired shots into his wife's car as she drove away to escape him. The couple are now getting divorced. He has been ordered to perform a community concert in Atlanta, Georgia, in return for the charges being dropped.

The decision is a puzzling one, and eyebrows were raised also when Brown was bailed for just $15,000 when first charged – a much larger sum is normal, taking into account the seriousness of the charge and the accused's personal wealth.

Chapman: Mandela birthday gigboost

"Remarkable"

NME JUN 25 Tracy Chapman becomes a big star overnight.

TRACY CHAPMAN HAS rocketed into the Top 10 with her debut album following her appearance at the Nelson Mandela birthday concert. She sold over 12,000 copies on the Monday morning after the Mandela gig. The young singer-songwriter is just one of the many acts who have gone back into the charts following the televised show. A spokesman for Gallup, which compiles the official BBC charts, said the concert gave a tremendous sales boost to Dire Straits and Whitney Houston and to a lesser extent Eurythmics and Simple Minds. Chapman has also reached the Top 40 singles chart with "Fast Car".

"As was the case with Live Aid three years ago, the massive TV exposure of the Mandela gig has resulted in various chart re-entries for latent LPs," said the Gallup spokesman.

Denied

NME JUN 4 The Sugarcubes cancel their US tour.

THE SUGARCUBES HAVE been forced to cancel their debut American tour because they were denied work permits by US immigration officials.

Iceland's finest were also turned down for visitor's visas, despite none of the band members having criminal records or subversive tendencies – the most common reasons for refusal.

The work permits were applied for at the beginning of April, but the official refusal reached them last Monday, the day they were due to leave for the six US dates. The visitor's visas were applied for so that if the band were unable to perform in the US, they could still go over for press interviews. The refusals came from the American Embassy in London, not Iceland, and rumours suggest that if the block had come from Reykjavik the Icelandic government could have campaigned on the group's behalf.

GETTY (2)

WorldMags.net

"Different types of sexy"

NME APR 2 Introducing a new band from Glasgow, The Vaselines.

High-camp commandants: The Vaselines' Eugene Kelly and Frances McKee

LIKE GREASED BOHEMIAN pick-pockets, they nipped into my heart and stole a small chunk of it. In its place they left two EPs of careless Sindie Pop that was as camp as a boy scouts' outing.

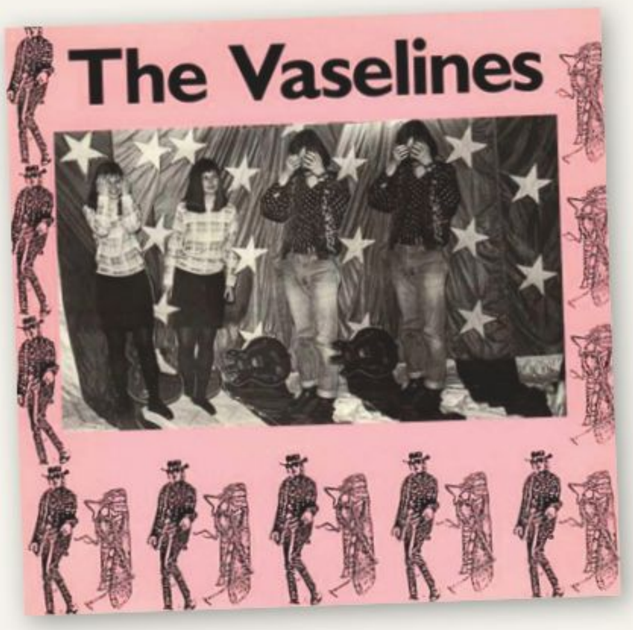
Who? The Vaselines, Frances McKee and Eugene Kelly, from Glasgow. Classic lovers, they are flirtatious, saucy and perversely attractive, and behind their fiery lip there's substance, not shit. If I told them the flat Halliwell murdered Orton in was up for sale, they'd fly down and buy it with a backlog of unspent giros. If I told them the drinks were on the *NME* and they had a Licence To Fib they would fly to a bar and return with stories as tall as their whisky. In fact, they did.

"Eugene was a dancer in a real seedy strip bar in town," gabble Frances. "He had to perform topless in a grass skirt with gold lamé shells over his nipples. It was really sad, because he hasn't got very nice legs; his ankles aren't bad though, and all these visiting businessmen would go and leer at him. I just went in there one day and rescued him."

So, there's a big gay scene in Glasgow, Eugene?

"Not as big as I'd like it to be. Mind you, once this guy came up to me at the train station and said, 'Do you want to earn a fiver?' and somehow I ended up strapped to a bed in Croydon for three days."

"Eugene was a dancer in a really seedy strip bar"



James Brown never got strapped to a bed with The Vaselines but he might as well have. We met for the exact time between the start of *Top Of The Pops* and the end of Thursday's *EastEnders* in a Glaswegian bar where drinking took second place to fighting. Frances sunk a selection of wine, cider and orange juice, and the dude, Eugene, stuck to the lager because it's a man's drink, you know. I had asparagus beer and Belgian soup. Our mutual acquaintance Stephen – the man who named The Vaselines and who puts out their records – peppered the conversation with Budweiser-sponsored rants that sizzled as they spat from his mouth.

"Listen, if you think these two are weird you've just got to look at 5 Star. Jesus, they're weird. Incest. Rampant incest. The Vaselines are normal compared to 5 Star," he told me.

Where do The Vaselines fit? Place The Jesus & Mary Chain on one side of your mind and Valerie Singleton on the other, and Eugene and Frances will slide eagerly in-between. Trash fetishists who've already covered "You Think You're A Man", the Divine song, as their debut 45, and whose second single, "Dying For It" (53rd & 3rd), is sleeved in garish pink with the repeated image of a limp-wristed cowboy and a locust splattered all over it, they're a class above the rest of the aspirants to the racket bracket.

Musically, they are a reaction against the pathetic pop that followed in the wakes of Stephen's temperamental band The Pastels and his mates The Jesus & Mary Chain.

Rather than parodying the sycophancy like Talulah Gosh, with whom the beginning and end of the joke rapidly became invisible, or The Pooh Sticks have done, The Vaselines have simply subverted the sexuality of the genre and taken it down amongst the dustbins and washing baskets of John Inman, Kenneth Williams and Cilla Black. They're high-camp commandants with a rowche and rumble, and they've certainly got their priorities in order.

Eugene and Frances know it is wit, cunning and flippant comment, and not Velvets riffs, that gives a band an edge. They know sex sells best, and even if it doesn't it's funnier than po-faced image-mongering. The Vaselines are tartish, not dry and sterile like Erasure and The Communards, nor Jaffa Cake-ish like Boy George or George Michael, but uncouth and sexy like Miranda Richardson's Queen Elizabeth I in *Blackadder*. They're dressed-down oiks, Eugene is Rupert Everett with Paddy McAloon's haircut, Frances is the girl who was too sharp to be a woman in the *Carry On* films.

"The thing is, there are different types of sexy," she tells me. "And those people that say, 'Hey, look at me I'm really sexy,' generally aren't, they're a real turn-off."

"We deliberately put our pictures all over our sleeves so that people get sick of seeing them, sick of having them rammed down their throats," adds Eugene.

Formed as The Good F-s three years ago, they switched their name to The Vaselines when they realised the Good F-s was commercially binding, and ever since they've grasped the rock'n'roll lifestyle with all the drug-throttled frenzy they can muster.

The new single raved about by Edwin Pouncey in last week's *NME*, has lashings of thrashing, wailing guitar smeared all over the first track, "Dying For It" by David Keegan, the pipe-cleaner punk from The Shop Assistants.

But as Stephen tells me: "David's not into music any more, he spends all his time skiing now."

"We'd finished the song but it needed something extra," continues Eugene. "We knew what we wanted, but I'm so talentless I couldn't play it, so we asked David down. He turned up with a load of fuzzboxes and went mental for 10 minutes. Then he left – it was perfect.

"'Teenage Jesus' on the B-side is what it sounds like when I try and get a really raw guitar sound. It takes a certain lack of talent to get that sort of guitar sound and I can manage it. 'Teenage Jesus' is about waking up and thinking you're Jesus. Lying in bed savouring what great things are before you, then your mum comes in and tells you to get up and get dressed.

"It's very strange, but Divine died the day 'Dying For It' came out."

Perhaps David Keegan will die the day your next single comes out.

"No, this Divine thing is weird. His films were our main inspiration. After all, he was the most disgusting person ever on Earth, someone's got to take over that post."

The Vaselines, perhaps?

"Perhaps."

Whilst they're not keen to waste away a night bitching about crappy Glasgow bands who've been spotlighted in the past, there are certain things that rub a Vaseline up the wrong way.

"Unnatural breasts. C'mon, have you seen that Vanessa Paradis girl? She's got unnatural breasts, she's definitely on hormones or something."

Eugene, would you pick on someone if they had strange legs?

"You don't have certain-sized legs for what age you are, but you do have certain-sized breasts – either large or small. I don't see many 14-year-olds walking around Glasgow with… with… thin breasts like that.

"What's so sad about it is, she looks like her manager has told her to wear a see-through leotard."

Pink sleeves, Divine covers, a suspicion of pubescent French girls, and a single that's as addictive as Sharp's Extra Strong Mints. Welcome to The Vaselines, this week's perfect perverts. *James Brown*

ALAISTAIR INDGE

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“I’m the best in town”

“I don’t fear anyone,” says a solo KEVIN ROWLAND. “People say, ‘Prince, he’s great, he’s amazing.’ Well, he is good, real good. But I can sing the arse off him – and I can write a better song.”

— NME JUNE 25 —

AS THE SONG goes, “*Here comes his soul, get your pens and notebooks ready.*”

Judging by the recent spate of interviews that have heralded Kevin Rowland’s return to the public eye, we are about to be dealing with a moody, potentially violent artist, who must be approached with the utmost caution.

Certainly, the press have been having a field day with the 34-year-old musician, gleefully recounting all the stories that have filtered through about this essentially private man since he began his recording career back in 1979. Tales of “weird” behaviour, extreme stubbornness and violent turns have dominated most of the articles, with an underlying tone of vengeance emanating from the writer in general.

Even the radio has joined in.

Rowland’s current single, “Walkaway”, is, one would have thought, a natural choice for daytime radio, with its light feel and catchy chorus. Walkaway yourself, comes back the answer. Radio play so far has been miniscule and the single has literally died a death before anyone could hear it. Rowland’s insistence on conducting himself how he feels best, and not in the approved way, has made him few friends.

It really isn’t that simple to write Rowland off, though. Because while the media have been busy hammering in the nails, the people who have actually known and worked with Rowland have been bringing in a different verdict, talking almost, it seems, about a different person.

Roger Ames, for instance, has twice signed Rowland to record companies. First to EMI, where they had a No 1 single with “Geno”, two other Top 40 hits and the best-selling *Searching For The Young Soul Rebels* LP, then to Phonogram, where Rowland currently records.

“He’s demanding,” says Ames, “but fair. He works real hard at what he does and he expects others to do the same, and as long as they do, everything is fine.”

“He inspires so many people,” says Seb Shelton, drummer for Dexys throughout the early ’80s but now no longer on speaking terms with Rowland. “He’s not ambitious in the normal sense of the word, but he’s »

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"I've got to be truthful to what I'm doing": Kevin Rowland poses for a press shot to promote his first solo album, *The Wanderer*

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very determined. He just can't tolerate people who aren't as determined."

Billy Adams, who along with Helen O'Hara formed the nucleus of the last Dexys phase, concurs: "The only people I've actually seen Kevin be nasty to are certain musicians who haven't pulled their weight and can't understand why everyone is getting annoyed with them. They're probably the ones who are walking around with these horror stories about Kevin."

Most people who think back to when they first met Kevin, to a person, use the word "determined" to describe him. Trouble only arises, it seems, when people working with Kevin lost that particular quality.

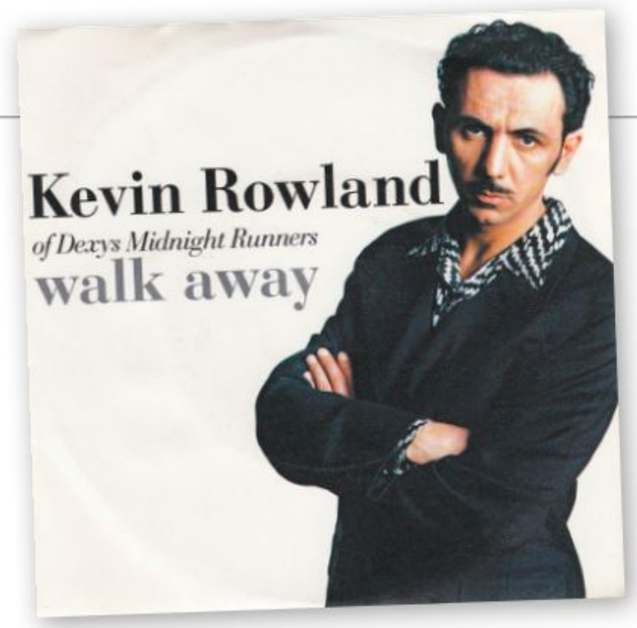
Seb Shelton again: "He's very single-minded, and that goes with the determination. I think anybody who's got something, for want of a better word, that they feel is a vision, they have to be single-minded to achieve it.

"Which is fine if you share that vision, that belief, which I did, but once you start feeling differently, that's when the problems arise. We were very close friends and we ended up not very close at all. I haven't spoken to him since I left and I've no wish to either. I mean, I actually left the group because I didn't like the songs he was writing for *Don't Stand Me Down*, and then I hear I was sacked. He doesn't need to do things like that, it's unnecessary."

That said, Shelton also believes he'll never play drums with another group again, simply because he feels no one could reach the heights that Dexys did.

Pete Barrett, sleeve designer for all of Rowland's records, has known Kevin for nearly 10 years now. His talk is of "charm" and "humour".

"When I first met him," he recalls, "I was really struck by his personality, I thought he was a really charming bloke. He's always struck me that way. When I first heard those stories about him hitting people or whatever, I literally thought that people were lying about him. I could never imagine him doing these things. The other thing that people miss as well is his sense of humour, because they're so used to taking him seriously. He has got a very funny sense of humour that people never suspect him of."



"I've developed... I feel like I've learnt my trade now"

THERE ARE, PERHAPS, two elements at work here which help cause such a public distortion of Kevin Rowland. The first is Rowland's reticence to talk about himself, the distrust of being portrayed as "a good bloke", the constant insistence that it's all there in the music for anyone who's interested.

When you listen to songs such as "Old", "Reminisce Part Two" or newer material such as "When You Walk Alone", the lyrics reveal a caring and sensitive side to Rowland's nature, a quality compounded further by Jim Paterson, Rowland's right-hand man up until *Too-Rye-Ay*, saying that if Kevin ever saw a tramp begging in the street, "it wouldn't be 10p he'd give, more likely a fiver. He has got a very compassionate nature."

Roger Ames adds, "Every musician Kevin auditioned for the *Don't Stand Me Down* LP, or used, and there were hundreds of them, was well paid. In fact, he paid them a fortune, and when the budget for the LP ran out, Kevin paid for everything out of his own pocket. He's the only artist I've known to have done that."

The second element leads us into the murky and troubled waters of class, Catholicism and the power of the imagination. "A lot of his ideas," says Pete Barrett, "only make sense later on. The influence he's had has been enormous, from his clothes, to the stage presentation, to taking on the music press. Nowadays these things are basically mainstream, but at the time they were unheard of."

In many ways, he's right. The increasing infatuation with soul music is something that goes right back to the first Dexys Midnight Runners and their anti-rock stance. In the mid-'80s, pop stars suddenly started talking about their health and exercise regimes, denouncing alcohol and drugs in the strongest possible terms.

Two years before, Dexys were out training every day, leading pure lives, banning drink at their shows, and being laughed at for their troubles. And then there's the clothes, a source of much humour for the press, who basically being middle class, have never understood the appeal of a certain style or look, or the history behind it.

For most of the music press, being radical amounts to nothing more than a stupid haircut, makeup and a leather jacket. They think that Brooks Brothers, the clothes Kevin accepted for the last Dexys LP, is probably the name for two American comedians, and the idea of style and presentation is a total anathema to most of them. Every working-class musician who has any interest in clothes has been greeted with the same dull insults.

"Ever since I've known him," says Billy Adams, "Kevin has been interested in clothes. Like the Brooks Brothers look – that came about when Kevin went to America during the *Too-Rye-Ay* period to do some interviews. When he came back he told us about this look, and then he spent months asking around about it, where you could buy it, and actually researching it. He really got into that look, although at the same time we couldn't wear it because we were still promoting *Too-Rye-Ay*.

With a hostile music press who have never understood the references, it was no wonder then that in 1980 Rowland took out a series of now famous ads announcing that there would be no more interviews with "the dishonest hippy music press", only a series of messages which would take the place of interviews.

"Everyone went mad about those adverts," recalls Ames, "telling Kevin he couldn't do it, it was suicide, etc. The thing is, though, even to this day, people still remember those adverts."

"The truth of the matter," says Seb Shelton, "is that he hasn't licked an arse in his career."

THIS REFUSAL TO court approval is perhaps why everyone gets so upset, starts calling him bolshy and awkward, which, let's face it, is part of his makeup. The man can be impossible when the occasion calls for it. For example, around the time of *Don't Stand Me Down*, Kevin was convinced that all he had to do with the LP was simply release it, with no single to accompany it.

"I had the whole thing about it as an album," he says, "and it didn't work. I thought it was so brilliant that all I had to do was put it out and everyone would buy it, but it doesn't work that way. I thought it would have been like *Dark Side Of The Moon*, and it could have been. There's nothing wrong with that record, I stand by that record, the music is great. But the whole promotion campaign just fell flat. Also, I had no manager at the time and there were a lot of problems."

"It was a good idea in theory," says Ames, "but in practice the only way of reaching people in the UK is through the radio, and to do that you have to have a single. Kevin wouldn't let one be released, and although his desire to be taken seriously was a fair one, the method didn't work."

Kevin now says that he was actually toying with the idea of a single until a guy at the record company annoyed him so much, he dropped the idea.

"At the time I could have been persuaded, but he went about it in such a manner that I dug my heels in even further. But I'll tell you something, I was in a major record shop the other day, one of the big chains, and I was talking to this bloke who worked there who told me that *Don't Stand Me Down* was the biggest-selling LPs out of the whole back catalogue. It's selling more and more and is now outselling all the others. So it's not that no one likes it, it's not like that at all."

The fact of the matter is that Kevin Rowland sets himself, and others, high standards, a trait, one could hazard a guess, that arises from his Catholic upbringing. Catholics are taught from a very early age that you are basically put on this Earth to suffer. They are wracked by guilt and informed that they carry original sin in their souls from the day they were born. They usually view the world in black and white, and right and wrong, and from this stems extremist tendencies.

So when Kevin Rowland sings about "*punishing the body*", "*compromise is the devil talking*" or "*taking these ridiculous moods away*", he is expressing a natural instinct born out of his religion. This is one of the

reasons that he can inspire so much fanaticism in his admirers, and divide his enemies so sharply. That and the fact that, for this decade at least, Dexys Midnight Runners have been responsible for some of the finest music to have emerged on record or stage.

Until, that is, we all woke up one day to find that Dexys were basically finished.

THE CAFE IS quiet and, ironically enough, a matter of minutes away from the EMI building. It was there, nine years ago after undertaking an interview with the group, that I had stormed around to challenge Rowland on the "dishonest hippy press" adverts.

"I don't blame you," Rowland says. "If I was you I'd be just the same, especially as you were one of the journalists that we'd done interviews with. You were bound to take it personally. I would have come round, just like you did."

Fresh from a morning spent in the gym, Rowland is in good form, chatty, amusing and keen to talk about his forthcoming solo LP, *The Wanderer*, a record he believes signals the start of his career. It's also the least intense thing he's ever released.

"Of course it is," he says, "but I've developed. I can sing much better than I ever did, I can write much better, put over a song better. I feel like I've learnt my trade now. I didn't realise it at the time, but it's just worked out that way."

It was, Rowland informs me, when he wrote the title track of the LP and the single, "Walkaway", that he realised a solo career was beckoning. For the first time, he didn't need the advice of others, something that he had constantly relied on from Kevin Archer at the beginning, Big Jimmy Paterson and Seb Shelton for *Too-Rye-Ay*, and Helen and Billy for the last LP.

"I couldn't see the songs in any other way," he says. "I didn't need to phone up Billy or Helen and say, 'You know this section here, should I put it here or should I put it there?' They would always give me good advice, which I didn't need any more.

"People are saying to me, 'Oh, you were solo before.' Well I wasn't. There was no way that I was solo before. Billy and Helen put so much into it, and I couldn't have done it without them. But I can do now and I told them, and they were all really positive about it. They said it's a great thing.

"I was worried about Billy. I was thinking, 'What's he going to do, what's he going to think?' He said, 'I think it's great. I'm really glad you told me, because I need something to spur me on.'

"Helen was going to stay around and possibly be a musical director, but she wanted to do her own solo thing. She decided that she had gone as far as she could. I was quite relieved, because it was a whole new start for me."

Written throughout '86, recorded in New York with producer Deodato over three months in '87, and finally released this year, *The Wanderer* will once again confound those who thought they could pin Rowland down musically. It is as far removed from Dexys as is possible, with a whole range of influences ranging from country & western to doo-wop, pop music, soul and even, hold your breath, rock'n'roll scattered throughout.

Lyrically, it is Rowland at his most explicit.

"I don't fight it, they just come from inside. I don't know how or why. When they were coming out 12 minutes long, I didn't fight that either. Now, they're coming out like this.

"With the words, I always put them down in the purest form. Sometimes I think it's getting close to the edge, but then I just think, 'Sod it, it's got to go in.' So I do it every time. I've got to be truthful to what I'm doing. It's me that's got to look into a mirror everyday."

HAVING NOT BOUGHT records for years, Rowland is now actively listening to music, enthusing about groups such as The Proclaimers and watching *Top Of The Pops* each week.

He admits to a long gap between each LP but thinks that is all going to change given his new-found strength and confidence in himself.

"I have become a lot more prolific. I haven't been writing at the moment because of promotion and stuff, but I have been writing more, so I'm getting better at my trade. Like, for me, *The Wanderer* is the LP of the year, no question about it. Someone might be able to equal it, but no one will beat it.

"Like you asked me if I was a good musician, well… I think I'm the best in town. I don't fear anybody alive. I hear people going, 'Oh, so-and-so is great.' Well, I don't fear anyone. I'm as good as anyone.

"Even Prince. People say, 'Prince, he's great, he's amazing.' Well, he is good, real good. But I'm better than him. I can sing the arse off him and I can write a better song."

The trouble with Prince is that he puts out too many records.

"Exactly," replies Rowland, "I could do that, but what's the point? I could do it every three months. A couple of good songs and some rubbish. You look at it. How many have I written over a year? Ten good ones. I could put two of them and a load of rubbish out every three months, no problems."

If your company allows you, that is.

"No one allows me or disallows me anything," says Rowland seriously. "I make my own choices. I've earned that position."

In the title track of your LP, there's a line in there, referring to your inability to settle down, which runs, "*It may be madness, I just don't know.*" It seems like a very frank thing to be talking about.

"Yeah," Rowland replies, musing on his sanity, "It might be, but that's the way it is. There might be one or two who agree with that. I've heard that one said. But I don't think so. I think while you're concerned about it, you're probably alright. When you're not worried about going mad, you're probably going mental. I think I'm quite sane."

Most people I've spoken to say that around the time of *Don't Stand Me Down* you were at your most intense, one of your "unreasonable" stages, where you were determined to go your own way and sod the consequences.

"I think one of the reasons I made *Don't Stand Me Down* is because I wasn't really happy with *Too-Rye-Ay*. It could have been a brilliant album. It was a good album, there were some really good tracks on it – "Eileen", "The Waltz" and others – but a lot of it didn't work.

"Half the band were leaving at the time; the production thing really wasn't right. We did a radio session of 'Until I Believe In My Soul' about nine months earlier which was so much better. So I really wanted to make sure that *Don't Stand Me Down* was 100 per cent how I wanted it. And it was good. Loads of people came up to me and said it was everything they were thinking."

This LP, hammered for the dialogue in-between tracks, the ultra-conservative look of the group, and the ambitious nature of the songs, is in fact one of the key LPs of the decade, and easily Dexys finest hour.

To compare it to *The Wanderer* would be foolish, as both works are so far apart. "It's just a combination of your influences," says Rowland about his art, "your life from the word go. Where you grew up is a big influence, what school you went to, the religion you were, your parents and all that."

In Rowland's case, this was a working-class upbringing – two brothers, two sisters and a father who ran a successful building company.

"Don't think we were brought up poor or anything," Rowland interjects, "we were given, as kids, everything we needed. But I don't go in for that working-class hero stuff. What I'm trying to do is a kind of classlessness."

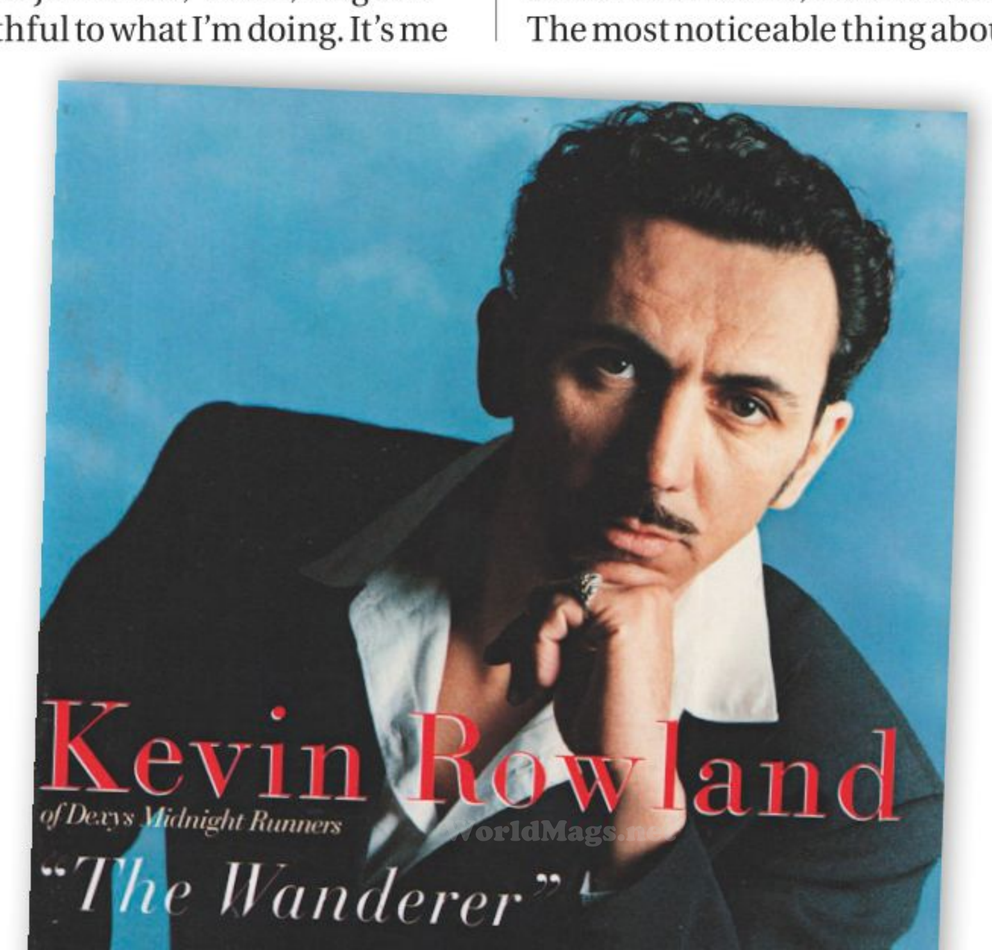
This is tempered, however, by Rowland's identification with the working class and his attacks, in his forthcoming single, on the middle classes. When I begin to attack the working class, he's quick to the draw.

"It's alright," he points out, "to say that the working class aren't the crème de la crème, but the working class in this country are in a corner. The most noticeable thing about this country is the class system, without question, and it's one of the things that's really bad for it.

"But I quickly learnt, years ago, that being a professional cockney is just nowhere, so I've moved on from them. I've made every attempt to neutralise my accent, because I don't want to be bracketed. I'm interested in self-improvement, really, but that doesn't mean becoming middle class, because I would never want to do that."

What Rowland wants to do is simple. Establish himself as a songwriter and singer who is granted due respect and success. It would be a foolish person who bets against him achieving exactly that.

Paolo Hewitt •



"I don't make an issue out of being a woman"

On tour in LA with the Bono-hating SINÉAD O'CONNOR. "I don't feel like a bra-burning, baby-eating, priest-hating, men-hating feminist," says the divisive singer, "but I do feel that there are chauvinist bastards in the world who ought to be shot."

— MELODY MAKER JUNE 4 —

"MANDINKA" IS PLAYING on the radio, neatly sandwiched between an ad for a discount llama sale in Omaha, Nebraska ("A llama will never let you down"), and a news bulletin reporting that a 12-year-old boy, last week jilted by his 11-year-old sweetheart, is now holding his entire class hostage with an Uzi automatic. "That's life," the DJ announces. "Women will always let you down. It's 10.43 on KCRO."

One hour later, Sinéad wakes up in California. It's Friday and the blurry tour itinerary says *Sun* Francisco. It's raining cats and dobermans outside. That's life. Mispronounced. It should read *laugh*.

Sinéad O'Connor's meteoric rise to prominence has taken everyone by surprise. Most of all Sinéad. One man at the American record company was so convinced of Sinéad's limited appeal, he swore he'd shave his head if her album *The Lion And The Cobra* sold more than 25,000 copies. Over half a million Americans now own a copy. The faithless exec now owns a crop worthy of the marines and has developed a sudden interest in fishing hats.

Sinéad has played to sell-out crowds throughout this 30-date tour – her first visit to American outside New York. Her ripped jeans, Doc Martens, tutus and No 1 cut are recognised wherever she goes, and wherever she goes she receives recognition. When she left school at 16 to join a band, there were moments when she dreamt of this life. Now she's living out the scenes of her own daydream.

"It never occurred to me that anyone would give a shit about my songs, because they are so personal," she says. "The reaction to the first album has been so orgasmic; my only real fear is not being able to live up to the expectations people now hold for me."

Sinéad also lives with the fear that any time now she might step out of the shower and discover she's back in Dublin, a nobody again, and it's all been a *Dallas*-style dream.

"I have nightmares if I sleep on my back," she says. "I had a really brilliant one last night. I was being chased by a shark in a blue dress. It had a string of pearls as well. »

ANDREW CATLIN

WorldMags.net

"I could be half-mad already": Sinéad O'Connor photographed for *Melody Maker*, May 1988

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March 16, 1988: O'Connor at the Vredenburg music venue in Utrecht, Netherlands

FRANS SCHELLEKENS / GETTY

For some reason my friend and I decided to pour drink down it when it was in the water and get it drunk so it wouldn't chase us any more.

"We bashed it with this big stick and it came up out of the river and ran off after me – a shark in a blue dress chasing me down a motorway. I woke up as the shark was about to climb up the stairs."

Sigmund Freud, where are you? It's carnival time. (No, it's not.) It's 1.30pm. Three hours later, she plays to America's press corps.

CAMERAS WHIZZ, TAPE recorders grind and questions are fired at her from every conceivable angle. Questions like, "Do you get frustrated when you're compared to Kate Bush?"

"Not really. Not as much as when I get compared to Joan Armatrading! Because I'm a woman, people will always compare me to other women. That's life." (*She laughs*) "It only really annoys me when it's someone like Suzanne Vega."

After this point, things started to become painfully fatuous. First prize went to the dildo who asked, "Any chance of seeing some hair soon?", meaning, "Is it still necessary to preserve such a striking image now that you've dented the charts?"

"No," she answers, meaning, "Shut up, jerk."

From the press conference, we also learn the following:

Sinéad is Irish.

She is 21 and has three brothers and four sisters.

She also has a son, Jake, who is nine months old and travels with her.

Sinéad wants to fuck Mickey Rourke. "Would I have worked with him in *Barfly*? I'd clean the guy's toilet. After watching *Angel Heart* I couldn't sleep for weeks."

Sinéad won't be fucked over by anyone.

She enjoys watching *Neighbours*.

After leaving school she became a singing telegram. Her favourite outfits were the French Chambermaid and the Naughty Nun.

Wet Wet Wet are shite and "the most aptly named band of the century", closely followed by Curiosity Killed The Cat, Transvision Vamp and anyone save a handful of hip hop acts, and of course, Sugarcubes.

Journalists at press conferences have learned the art of finding a thousand different ways to asking the same inane questions.

Without at least half a bottle of brandy inside you, press conferences are insufferably tedious unless someone gets punched out. It nearly happened twice, but not quite.

"I find them quite amusing," Sinéad says when back in the hotel room. "I almost feel like a film star, like Marilyn Monroe."

> "On stage I feel very strong. When I get off stage I feel like shit"

THE TIME IS now 1988, and while pop's male warriors wallow in a festering sludge-pit of inept regression or risible pastiche, it is the women who are heaving pop back into the ravages of rapture.

Throwing Muses' Kristen Hersh, Sugarcubes' Björk and Sinéad have nothing in common save a vision beyond what has already been observed. Oblivious to the mundane orchestrations of vacuum pop, they have their hands clasped around a celestial Spirograph, and their random express trains of thought could lead anywhere.

So how has all this come to pass? The liberals would argue it's just happy coincidence that all three have kiddies, and have lived outside the established urban centres for pop.

Bullshit. The reason is fundamentally sexist. Men and women are not equal. For over 2,000 years, man has attempted to wrest power away from women for one single reason – because they can't get pregnant and are, therefore, merely bystanders in the central process of life: creation. Material power is a poor substitute.

Sinéad understands the power of birth, and stands under the loose-weave banner of the post-feminist, based on an internal strength that breeds its own defence against exterior pressures: "I don't feel like a bra-burning, baby-eating, priest-hating, men-hating feminist, but I do feel that there are chauvinist bastards in the world who ought to be shot. Unfortunately, they all seem to work in the music business.

"I don't make an issue out of being a woman. On the other hand, I don't let any man treat me like shit. I really, really believe women are their own worst enemies, because they treat each other like shit. They're always jealous of other women who are in a position they really want to have, but haven't the guts to attain.

"The only shit I've ever got in my life has been from women. At school, more particularly than any other time in my life. I went out with the most gorgeous-looking bloke in our school, and when the girls found out I kissed him, no one would talk to me. I got beaten up by one of the sixth-form boys on behalf of these girls."

Sinéad does not see herself as part of a new vanguard for women in pop, however: "I've never heard Throwing Muses, but I've heard about them. The Sugarcubes are fuckin' brilliant, there's no two ways about it. Björk is *the* greatest singer in the history of the world as far as I'm concerned."

THE SONGS ON *The Lion And The Cobra* are all trenchant splinters of autobiography. Writing songs as a form of exorcism can have major drawbacks. It takes years of experience to assemble enough material for an album. If nothing happens, nothing gets written.

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Like most writers who create in extremes. Sinéad works best when she's coming out of a depression. A contented life is the enemy of creation: when you're happy there's no need to write; when you're manically depressed you're too nihilistic and apathetic to write.

It's the moment just after that's productive – the moment when you think you're wiser, and stronger. The moment before you realise the whole cycle will inevitably repeat itself. There is, therefore, an enormous temptation to deliberately sabotage your personal life for the sake of song.

"Definitely," she says, running her hand over the scar on her scalp. "It's not that I do it on purpose, or I enjoy it, it's just that I end up doing it. There's a warped tiny voice in the back of my mind that likes it because I know I'm going to get some song out of it. There's definitely something nice about being fucked up."

Of all the film roles that have been cast, Sinéad would have wanted to play Sally Field's part in *Sybil* – the story of a schizophrenic with eight personalities. Again, like Hersh and Björk, Sinéad is fascinated by madness – that mental release from constraints of the everyday into the vortex of the irrational.

"I'm more obsessed with schizophrenia than with madness. I don't necessarily think I'm schizophrenic, but I'm very interested in people who are. My favourite boyfriends have been the most fucked up ones."

IT'S NOW 9.15 in the evening and fears that Chris Roberts' recent savage live review of Sinéad might have been all-too accurate evaporate as she hits the last chorus of "Just Like U Said It Would B". Boiling emotions and cobalt-cool annihilation entwine to leave the San Francisco audience breathless.

Sure, the set slouches in the middle and, apart from Mike Joyce and Andy Rourke, the two former Smiths, the band act like a lobotomised youth club metal band. But pop has never required consistency. Pop demands milliseconds of whizzing wonder and the suspension of grey matter: like Sinéad's ferocious wail at the finale of "Never Get Old". This is priceless. At times, she has to move away from the mic because her operatic blast is so powerful, it's already blown all the speakers in two PAs. This is expensive.

"When I'm on stage, I feel very strong," she says after the show. "When I get off stage I feel like shit. If you're shaggin' somebody you're not sure about, you never feel strong. But fucking someone you love gives you immense strength."

It's a sad indictment of the current press attitude toward women and sex that reviews are swamped with observations like Sinéad's gobbing on stage or clutching her crutch when singing, which are then used to highlight her boyishness.

"The thing is, it's OK if a woman is sexy and writes girlishly suggestive words, but it's not OK to write hard songs about sex. It's OK to say "I Want Your Hands On Me", but I've got real shit when people have heard the content of the new songs.

"Part of the reason people come to the gigs is that it's a curious mixture. I look really hard, but some songs are really soft and emotional. Everything about me and the music is a contradiction in terms. People like contradictions."

In her songs, Sinéad is both victor and victim. Last year [*MM* writers] The Stud Brothers described Sinéad O'Connor as an "enigma", and they were right. Nothing about her adds up. She has a will of steel, yet can't bear to be alone "even for five minutes". She is too brutally honest to be distanced from her songs, yet her songs are sometimes too remote for her subject matter. Like all enigmas, *too* and *too* add up to five.

"I can't think why it's so successful. The songs aren't that great, they're not that original. I think 'Troy' may be. I think it's because of the way I am as a person. A lot of the fan letters I get say they like the music but like me a lot more. Most of my letters are from women. I get a lot of letter from skinhead boys too. It worries me, because I don't want a big skinhead following."

Huge success can also have equally large deficits. A private life can swiftly become a public safety hazard: "I'm wary in case I became hugely successful and it would turn me into something I'd hate to be. A lot of people who become successful forget they weren't always successful, and they lose touch with reality and get self-righteous ideas about themselves. I'd hate that to happen."

Sinéad is talking about Bono, her Pubic Enemy Number One. The reason for venting spleen in Bono's direction is simple: Bono is the person Sinéad is most frightened of becoming, and people have a nasty habit of becoming what they most fear.

"He believes he's sincere about what he stands for. Hitler was sincere too. If you sit on your arse and allow yourself to become affected by success there's no excuse. They take themselves so fuckin' seriously. He's just a stupid turd.

"I don't take myself that seriously. I take my writing seriously, and I look after my voice, but I'm not trying to dominate the world or anything. I hate people who are into world domination. It's just a laugh."

For some it's just life.

"I just want to be a goddess," she jokes. "No, a cult goddess."

They're timeless.

"What's the time? 12.56? I'll be off, then."

It's 12.56. Again. My watch has become timeless… and useless. It's stopped raining, so we must be in LA, the city where fantasy is overrun by bizarre reality. Nothing has happened between now and "then" except sleep. And the occasional dream.

"I had this dream that I was in my father's house in my younger brother Owen's bedroom," Sinéad recalls. "He had this bowl of fish that he asked me to clean out for him. I flopped all the fish out of the bowl and onto this big piano which was there for some reason. My mother walked into the room and said hello to me and, as soon as she said hello, all the fish turned into bubblegum."

Warhol meets Dalí between the sheets. Do you ever have recurring dreams?

"I have this recurring nightmare that I'm being stalked by a murderer. That one really fucks me up. One time I was being stalked along the Embankment. I never see the face and it's a knife he's got. I also have this nightmare that I'm being sent to prison, or being locked up somewhere."

You could be going mad.

"I could be half-mad already. I don't think it's something you should try to be, but I think it's something you naturally are, or else you wouldn't start doing this in the first place. The reason people write songs is that they're fucked up about things and it's their way of expressing it."

A PAIR OF STEEL toecaps twinkle in the Hollywood sun as Sinéad stands by Marilyn Monroe's cement footprints. She doesn't speak for a full five minutes.

"How can someone as beautiful as Monroe have been so fucked up?" Sinéad muses. "You know the Kennedys, that pair of capitalist bastards, are solely responsible for her murder."

I suggest that fame could have played a part in the tragedy, but Sinéad has no truck with this theory.

"Fame doesn't mean a thing. It doesn't change the way you think, the way you…"

"Could you autograph my sleeve for me?" A teenager interrupts us. As soon as one signature is complete, six more sleeves appear. Two men on the periphery are videoing everything, until they accost me and ask, "Who is he, man?"

"He is a she," I explain (it's a common enough mistake).

"Wow. She must be famous. She looks famous. How famous is she?"

The answer, of course, should have been, "More famous than you, dickbrain." In Tinseltown, if you're not someone, you're no one. Anonymity is only slightly preferable to having your toenails manicured with a chainsaw. In the end, I told them she was Charlie Manson's daughter and they left satisfied. They say Hollywood is not a place, but a state of mind, and most people's minds here are in one hell of a state.

The sky is bluer than it is in Britain. It's difficult to believe it's the same sky. It's difficult to believe we're on the same planet. »

> "The only shit I've ever got in my life has been from women"

1988

APRIL – JUNE

FRANS SCHELLEKENS / GETTY

"I don't like danger, but find myself drawn to it": Sinéad O'Connor in Utrecht

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This afternoon's news reports that 16 people have died this week in LA's gang feuds. Sinéad has just finished a book called *Northern Ireland – The Woman's War*, which features interviews with the women of Belfast, both Protestant and Catholic. The book and the issues behind it stir a vociferous response to questions about taking sides.

"I support the IRA and Sinn Féin. I don't like the violence, but I do understand it. It's necessary even though it's terrible. I feel particularly sympathetic to the women and the families of prisoners in Northern Ireland. The British government should get out of Northern Ireland. I don't think the Protestants should get out; it's as much their home as anyone's.

"The way I'd like to help is to go to Belfast this summer and meet Gerry Adams and get him to show me around the town. I'd donate a large amount of money to the prisoners' organisation which pays for the wives of the prisoners to come and visit and for their children to go to school – realistic schemes like that. There's far more to the Irish situation than just the IRA and the British army. There are still people starving in Ireland."

To every complex problem, there's a simple solution. And it's always wrong. Sinéad is thoughtful for a moment and then launches into the theory of constructive violence.

"I'm ashamed to say this, but I really feel the only way to solve certain world problems is to obliterate the fuckers who are causing them.

"People like Botha, Thatcher and Ian Paisley should be shot. It's the only solution. And it's horrible, but these people are not prepared to listen to reason. I wouldn't have the guts to pull the trigger myself, but it has to happen."

> "I support the IRA. I don't like the violence, but I understand it"

FAR FROM THE madding crowd, Sinéad cranes her neck as we drive past the pseudo-French gingerbread mansions, fake Spanish haciendas and mock-Tudor castles that make up the make-believe world of Beverly Hills.

"This place is fuckin' wild," she says, half amused, half amazed. One nice, safe AOR album and all this could be yours, Sinéad. It's what everyone expects. Then I remember the two songs.

The one called "Jump In The River" with pastoral lines like "*That night we fucked so hard, there was blood on the walls*", or the untitled piece of venom whose chorus goes something like "*We slept all night, my arse in your face, your face in my dreams*". Fears that Sinéad would be swept into the cosy *Q* world of sterile crap seem a trifle exaggerated.

"I think I could live here," she says as we pass James Stewart's vitamin E-enriched Regency mansion. But Sinéad couldn't live here. Life would be too easy. LA is a beautiful city entirely populated by morons. As if to prove the point, a surf-dude motors by in his hot rod and just can't resist opening his mouth…

"Hey dude, like the hair," the cretin yells.

"Fuck you!" Sinéad hollers. It's the first and last time she raises her voice above a soft Andrew Eldritch whisper.

IT'S 8.30PM AND the world is Sinéad's oyster. All she has to do is find the right screwdriver. It might also help if she could get into her own concert. The security guard outside steadfastly refuses to allow this strange Irish woman backstage.

"I really do need to get backstage soon. The show starts in about 20 minutes."

"That's as may be, ma'am, but I can't allow just anyone through. I'm sure you can see her after the show."

"You're looking at her now."

"Yeah, yeah, sure. And I'm Bruce Springsteen…"

Luckily Bruce is distracted, Sinéad slips past, and the show starts with its star centre stage.

"When I walk on stage, apparently, I look very intimidating. As soon as I smile, they all relax and the crowd goes wild. If I had hair, there wouldn't be any of that. Maybe there would. Even when I was at school, people thought I was frightening."

Her mouth makes a perfect "O" when she sings. A nought through which writhing ecstasy and crippling torment are sucked in, chewed up and hurled out. "Jackie" starts the emotional onslaught, and by the time she reached the end of "Troy" the stalls were awash with brine.

Sinéad had been hoping all day for the brown-eyed Mickey Rourke to appear. He allowed her to use his picture on the cover of the last single, and phone calls to agents have already been made. The scenario was simple enough: they would meet, fall passionately in love, and screw the night away. It was all she hoped for. What she got that night backstage after the show was Rutger Hauer swaying toward her.

"Sinéad, you were fuckin' brilliant," the one-time replicant from *Blade Runner* exclaims. "I'm going to have to give you a hug."

Sinéad throws him a stare a gorgon would be proud of and the lolloping film star stops dead in his tracks.

"You'll keep your fuckin' hands to yourself."

No one had ever spoken to Rutger like that before.

LIFE IS MADE up of perfect moments. They come without warning and disappear within seconds. Driving down Hollywood Boulevard in a big car (it was huge), one such moment suddenly appeared. It's just like starring in a movie with…

"I think we're being followed," Sinéad says watching the traffic behind. She thinks we're starring in *The Big Heat*. Wait a tick, she's right. We are being followed.

"Do you think you can lose them?" she asks. Jesus, now she thinks we're in *Starsky And Hutch*. I tried hard (once I even managed to drive on the right side of the road), but fans in LA are fanatics and the car kept in hot pursuit (note the film-speak) until we reached the hotel. The passengers get out, see Sinéad in the flesh, one girl promptly bursts into tears, the other almost loses her dinner.

"Stupid cows," Sinéad hisses. "I hate women like that. I get boys who are besotted with me and bring me flowers, but men are too afraid of me. It's so degrading. It makes my life a lot harder, because if men are treated like that by some women, then men expect to be treated like that by all women."

Despite the odd fracas, Sinéad enjoys being recognised. When she doesn't, she rents out cranium space to a rather fetching black wig.

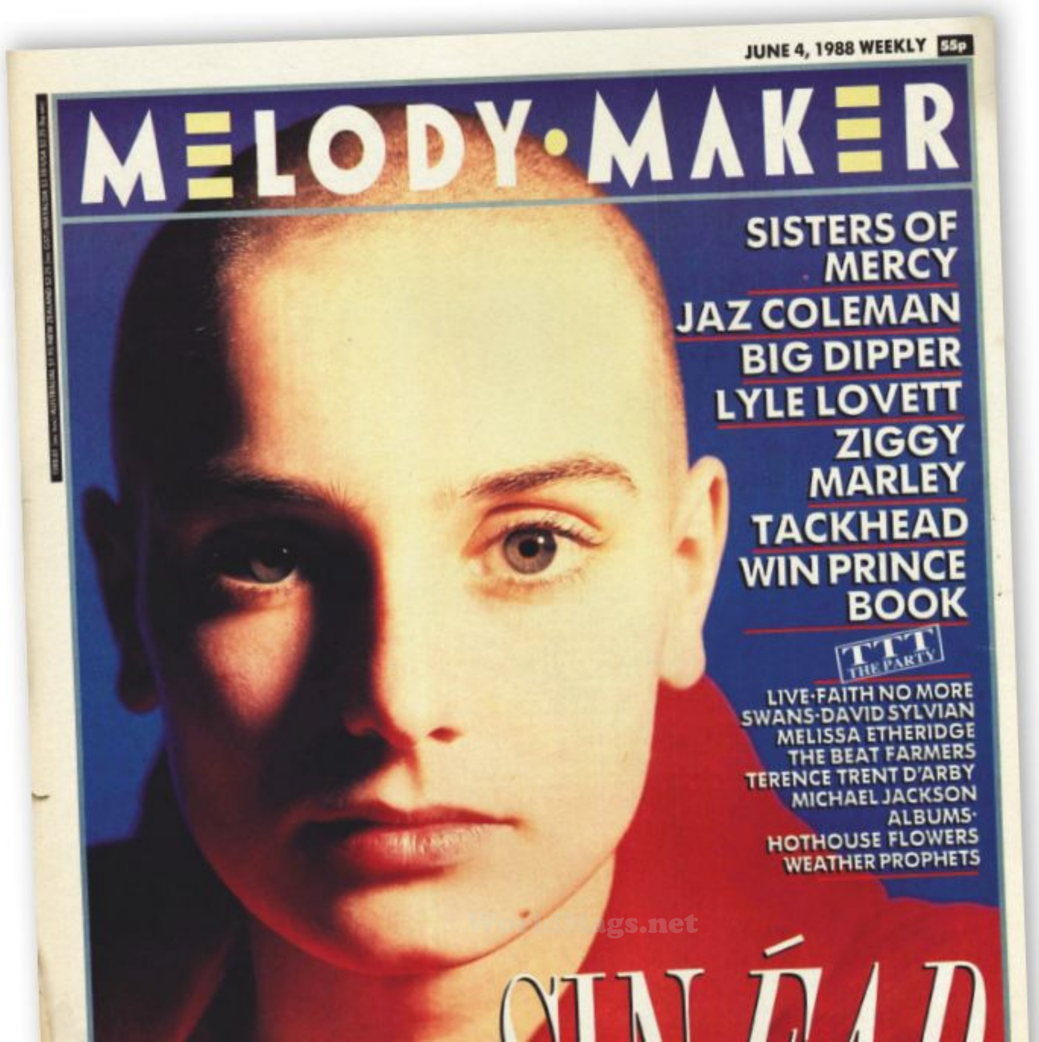
"I never, ever get chatted up. Only when I wear the wig. They don't know who I am or anything – suddenly men fancy me and ask me to dance. I am a nice girl really."

It sounds like you feel guilty?

"I torture myself with guilt. I cry my eyes out and scare myself shitless on aeroplanes because I think I'm such a lousy person God's going to take me away. I'm obsessed with death. I don't ever write about it, but I think about it every day. I don't like danger, but find myself drawn to it.

"Forbidden fruit is always attractive. It's usually sexual danger, unfortunately, which is the worst. I usually get crushes on people that I logically shouldn't because it's dangerous, which makes me like it more, but I am a nice girl really."

With that she disappears into the sunrise.



IT'S 2.30 ON Sunday afternoon and "I Want Your Hands On Me" is fusing the daytime radio, sandwiched neatly between a commercial for discount hernia operations on Tuesdays and Thursdays and a forecast predicting a massive earthquake within the next month.

Sinéad O'Connor: a cult goddess indeed. *Ted Mico* •

Still unsettled

MM JUNE 11 Rejuvenated but in essence unchanged, Leonard Cohen returns triumphantly to London.

ROYAL ALBERT HALL
LONDON
LIVE!
MAY 30

IN CONTRAST TO his '80s imitators, Len has always signalled a triumph of content over style. We can be grateful he never did escape the pessimistic eroticism of his private life, never did shake off his eternal night and subject his thoughts to the ageing process of daylight, because these things have made each of his increasingly infrequent forays to Blighty if not exactly a celebration then always an occasion.

Len is different to any other nostalgia show, simply because he isn't nostalgia – Cohen's singular, obsessive thematic concern is timeless, as painful now as it was then. Two thousand years on, up there in the glare of public scrutiny, Cohen's muse is still chained by the inescapable truth that, even in the most passionate affair, there's a distance between two people. A distance between their needs, wants – their way of being – and not even the sheerest intimacy, the closest honesty or the most obsessive lust can bridge it. Cohen still can't keep the girl, still can't sustain romantic tranquillity, but more remarkably, even after all those years and all those upsets, still can't bear to merely observe all this. He still wants to feel, to throw himself in hook, line and sinker just one more time.

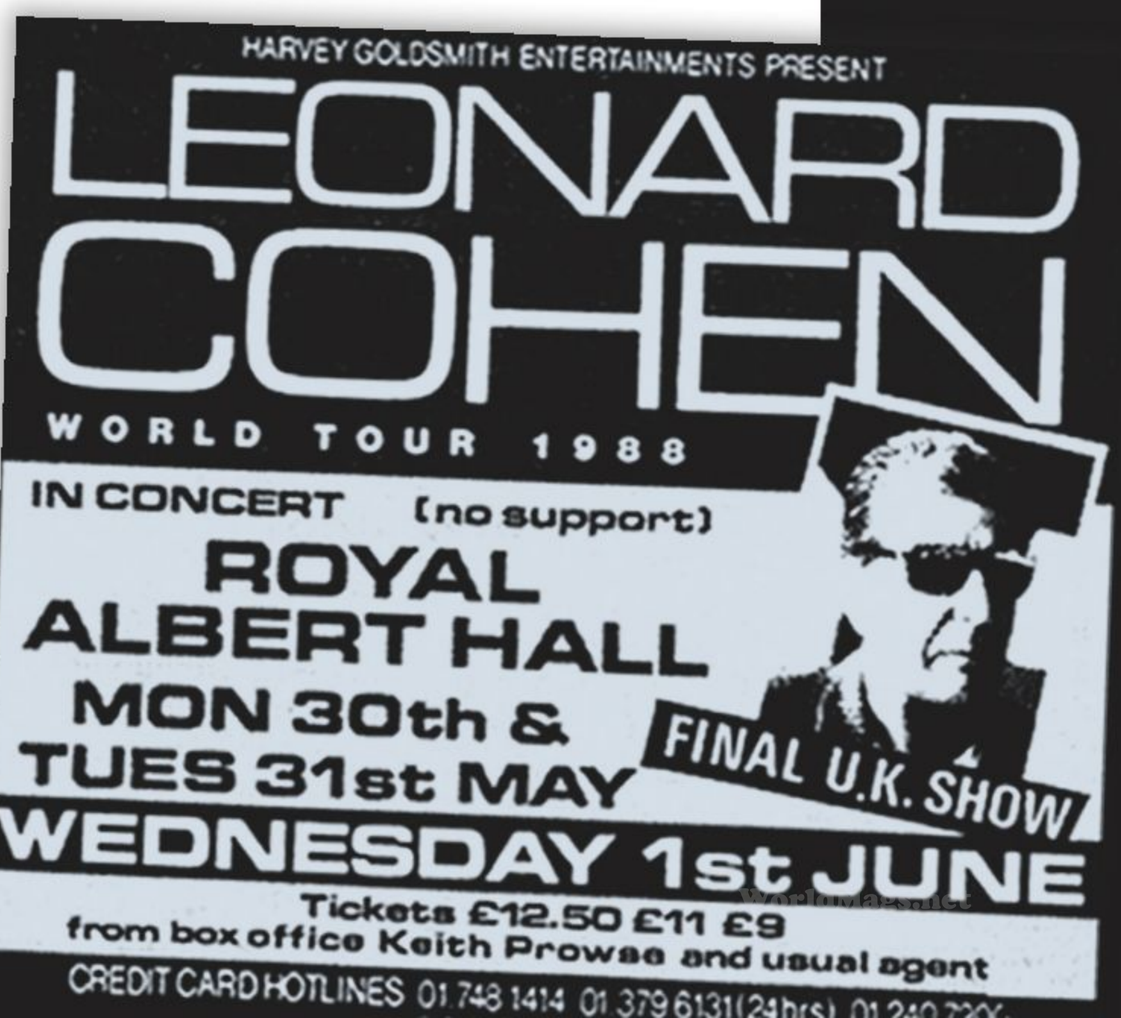
Thankfully his band are only mildly muso, managing to gloss over most of the arrangement misdemeanours of the recent *I'm Your Man* LP, which was given a full airing tonight. Len himself looked more like the long-suffering restaurant manager of a dodgy 18-30s holiday hotel than the ladykiller of old. The image was compounded when he sauntered over to each performer, hunched up his shoulders and listened intently about a foot away. When they finished, you almost expected him to delve into the pockets of his sharp black suit and pull out a piece of paper with marks out of 10 written on it.

He sauntered over to each performer and listened intently about a foot away

"Suzanne", "Sisters Of Mercy" and "The Stranger Song" were all still unsettled by the original occult romanticism. By contrast "First We Take Manhattan" was aired jauntily, closer to Jennifer Warnes' strident rock-out than the wet fart that appeared on *I'm Your Man*. But it was when it was just him, his guitar and that voice that the shivers really started.

Cohen could have so easily gone "CD" on us. The lived-in looks are a godsend, the slicked-back hair and expensive shades all prerequisites for a born-again yuppie cash-in. His heart, however, is still as deep as his voice, and his grip on art and artistry firm.

Songs of love and hate? You bet. *Mat Smith*



FRANZ SCHELLEKINS / GETTY

Occultromanticism: Leonard Cohen appears at the Muziektheater in Amsterdam, April 18, 1988

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January 20, 1988: Bob Dylan performs "Like A Rolling Stone" after being inducted into the Rock And Roll Hall Of Fame at the Waldorf Astoria hotel, NYC

EBET ROBERTS / GETTY

ALBUMS REVIEW 1988

ALBUMS

Bob Dylan Down In The Groove CBS

Time was, of course, when the release of a new Bob Dylan album was an event; an occasion for fanfares and front pages. The last decade, however, has not been kind to Dylan, and since 1983's *Infidels* he has struggled to maintain even a cursory consistency. Mostly, he has sounded muddled, lost, sadly adrift. These days, word that a new Dylan LP is on its way is likely to provoke only anxiety, a worry that what's going to follow will only add to the embarrassments of much he has produced in the '80s.

The general response so far to *Down In The Groove* suggests that it is largely worthless, the last gasp of a derelict talent; that Dylan here has virtually given up, can't possibly be serious, is just taking the piss, out of his record company as much as his public.

Much has also been made of the fact that Dylan has written so little new material for the LP, which has been taken as further evidence of his apparently major writing block. More than this, of the four songs he's had a hand in here, one, the astonishingly bleak "Death Is Not The End", dates from the *Infidels* sessions, another, "Had A Dream About You, Baby" is an alternative take of a rickety old number originally written for the *Hearts Of Fire* soundtrack, featuring undistinguished contributions from Eric Clapton and Ronnie Wood. Meanwhile, of the two songs co-written with Grateful Dead lyricist Robert Hunter, only the contrived symbolism of "Silvio", with brisk acoustic patterns supporting a vintage vocal, bears anything like reasonable scrutiny. I wouldn't argue with anyone who thought the other result of their collaboration, the laboured "Ugliest Girl In The World", was one of the most uninspired four minutes in the whole of Dylan's repertoire.

The bulk of *Down In The Groove* consists of cover versions. And this, surprisingly, is where things look up in a big way. The choice of old chestnuts like "Let's Stick Together", "Got Love If You Want It" and "Sally Sue Brown" is not immediately encouraging, but their robust barroom kick and rumble are livelier than you'd expect. They certainly display an animation that was perilously missing from the stilted passages of *Empire Burlesque* and *Knocked Out Loaded*, though as I've said before, there's nothing here that really matches the epic stature of "Brownsville Girl", the greatest song Dylan has written since *Blood On The Tracks*.

These are spirited rock'n'roll performances, but it's the odd, mainly country-gospel ballads that are most intriguing here, give a clue to what Dylan might currently think about his own predicament and make *Down In The Groove* so fascinating, a distant companion piece, perhaps, to Costello's *Almost Blue*.

Both albums seem to have been recorded at low ebbs in their author's careers, at times when respectively they were trying to make sense of what over the years had happened to them, which is more than most of us will ever have to deal with. Neither album is reassuring, Dylan's especially. Like Costello on his country album, Dylan here also uses other people's words to articulate his own deeply felt conviction that it will all end in tears.

"Rank Strangers To Me", solo voice and guitar over plangent bass, is also relentlessly forlorn, a performance so stark it becomes a haunting. "Ninety Miles An Hour (Down A Dead End Street)", with Willie Green and Bobby King providing disconcerting subliminal vocal counterpoints to Dylan's withered lead, is almost unbearably poignant, a hymn to hopelessness and the cruel dashing of hope, whose mordant pessimism is recently unrivalled. Only the lustrous arrangement of the traditional "Shenandoah", with its shimmering Bo Diddley riff, presents an anticipation of the future that is not entirely ruined by what Dylan obviously fears is the calamitous reality that afflicts all our lives.

For these last tracks alone, *Down In The Groove* is unmissable, for what you make of what he says explicitly. Right now, I wouldn't be without it.

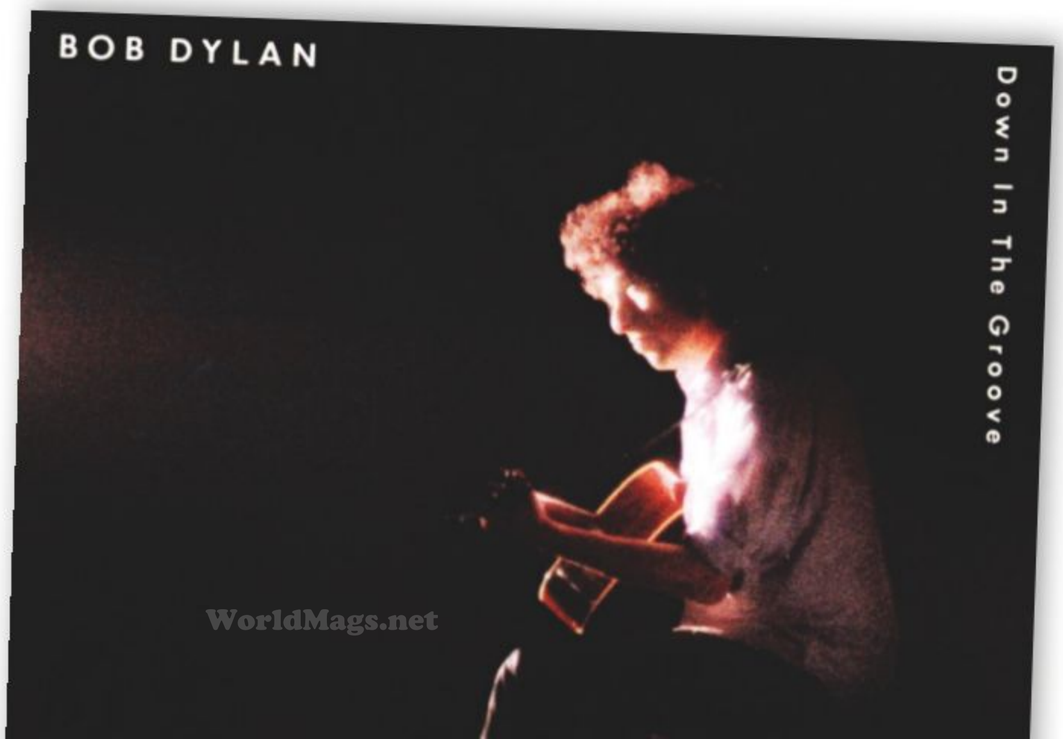
Allan Jones, MM June 18

The House Of Love The House Of Love CREATION

Well! I'm truly taken aback. That someone with nerves so jaded, with appetites accordingly so perversely attuned as myself, can be enthralled and utterly slain by... guitar shine, minor-chord plangency and melody... at this late hour... Well, it says something about The House Of Love. "Christine" even has a "*ba-ba-ba-ba-ba*" refrain that, for once, elates rather than deflates me.

"Christine" you must have heard about by now. A rare consensus has sprung up over this single round here, right across the spectrum from the Thanatos-worshipping cosmonauts to the lysergic dandy axis. It could well be this year's "Birthday".

The literary side to the group was handled last week by Jonh Wilde, so I guess I'll just deal with the sound, which he somehow managed to overlook. This, to me, is like failing to notice the sun's gone into supernova. If ears were eyes you'd need an arc-welding visor to face this dazzle. If you wanted to trace the origins of this lustrous, over-exposed guitar sound, you'd have to look back to the innovations of Wire and McGeoch. But closest counterparts today are the jagged opalescence of



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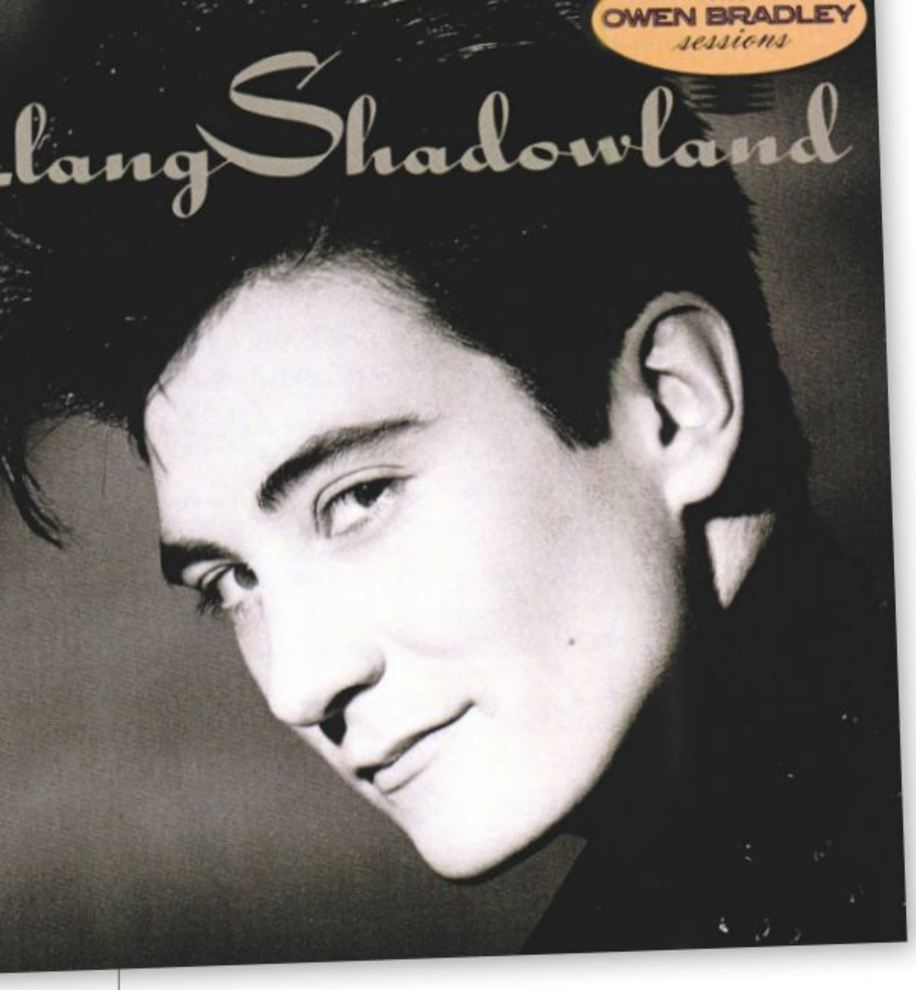


Nice Strong Arm (true mavericks from Texas), and the ice-spar apocalypse of AR Kane.

Remember that electric line in Van Morrison's "Ballerina": "*The light is on the left side of your hair.*" This sound is that light. "Love In A Car", "Happy", "Fisherman's Tale", "Touch Me" are all that close to the superlative "Christine". There are cadences and changes here that don't just trigger, they sound like the shiver down the spine.

I haven't got to grips with the words yet, but I imagine they're about the moments so precious they make you terribly aware of mortality. Or they're the things that help you ward it off: "*Deep blue eyes, take me through my sleep.*" In "Christine" there's despondency – "*and the world dragged us down*" – but also the sheer ascent and serene hover of the guitars, a defiance of gravity. A thought: the guitar sound is spring, the melody and lyrics autumn, "*pleasure turning to poison as the bee-mouth sips...*".

Guy Chadwick's vocal persona falls somewhere between Go-Betweens dry and meditative, and Chills chaste devotional. It's not a big voice, nor is it demonstrative, but it's the right one for this ravished gaze.

Without resorting to any of the self-conscious gestures of the "new", The HOL make it all feel so new again. For once, we are talking "perfect pop". But there are no specific echoes or retro vibes, just a myriad of reverberations. This is no petrified model of lost perfection, but rather perfectly petrifying. In both senses: this is the beauty that terrorises, this is the beauty that turns to stone. Timeless transcendence. *Simon Reynolds, MM May 21*

KD Lang Shadowland: The Owen Bradley Sessions SIRE

It sounds like a slight variation on the theme of *A Star Is Born*. Celebrated veteran producer is lured out of retirement to lend a helping hand to a young novice. The difference here is that we have a happy ending.

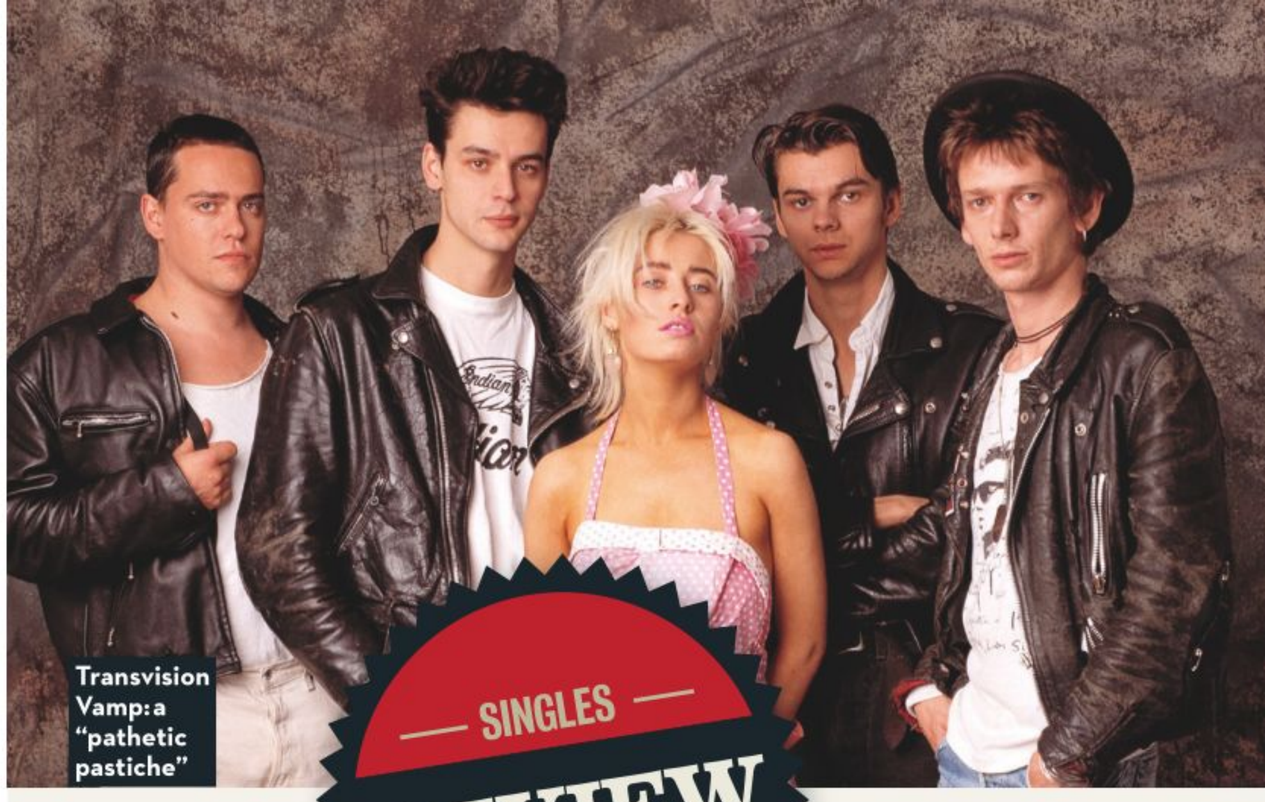
Owen Bradley is the man who brought orchestras to Nashville and captured the frail passion of Patsy Cline on disc. KD Lang is the Canadian upstart who, with her band The Reclines (the name is more than coincidence), has set American stages on fire over the last couple of years. Play this and her first album back to back and you'll find yourself in a very confused state. The debut, *Angel With A Lariat*, was recorded in London and produced by Dave Edmunds and consisted largely of Rockpilesque country pop – bouncing basslines, drums high in the mix and guitars twanging all the way to Tennessee. But it was dominated by Miss Lang's incredible voice throughout. The closing track, Patsy Cline's "Three Cigarettes In An Ashtray", was a hint of what KD could do with a big production ballad.

But whereas *Angel With A Lariat* was made up largely of Miss Lang's own songs, on *Shadowland* she has opted for other people's material throughout, perhaps at Bradley's advice.

It's a diverse choice, ranging from old chestnuts like Bob Wills' "Sugar Moon" right up to the Chris Isaak newie "Western Stars". KD floats effortlessly from the throwaway country swing of "Waltz Me Once Again Around The Dance Floor" to the heavy blues ballad "Black Coffee", an occasional live set opener.

Surprisingly enough, the weakest inclusion here is the closing "Honky Tonk Angels Medley", where Bradley's previous starlets Kitty Wells, Brenda Lee and Loretta Lynn lend a hand on a selection of average tunes. How can these women sing sad songs when they're obviously having so much fun?

KD Lang is so much more than a Cline clone; judge for yourself when she plays two London shows as part of the Route 88 festival in June. She's a tomboy tearaway capable of either making you dance or sending tears tumbling into your coffee cup. (8) *Terry Staunton, NME May 28*


Transvision Vamp: a "pathetic pastiche"

SINGLES REVIEW 1988

SINGLES

James Brown/ Coldcut The Payback Mix Part 1
URBAN/POLYDOR

Good to see the old tyrant being fucked around with; even if this is intended as a tribute, the very techniques practised upon the original texts involved, if not a disrespect, at least a disregard for their creator. No one gives a toss who James Brown is or was, or what unpleasant nonsense he has to say: they want to use his beats, and soon they'll have used them up. There's a certain academic interest in the fact that his cold, dehydrated grid of rhythms anticipated the juiceless rigour of hip hop. This mix gives us about as much as any normal person could take of any single JB groove (ie, five bars). *MM Apr 23*

The House Of Love Christine
CREATION

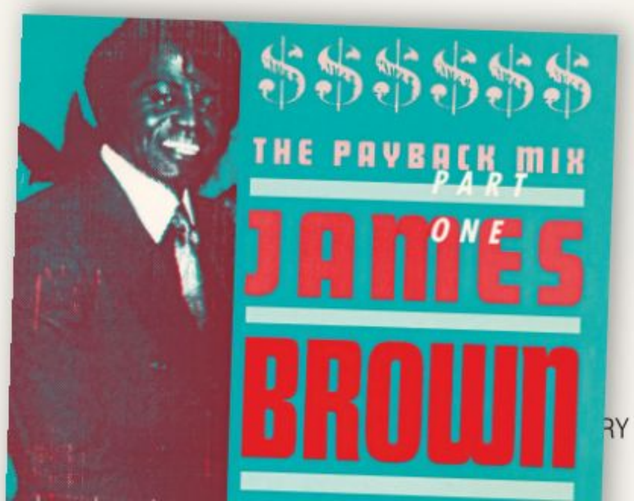
Not the spindly homage of bygone teen romanticism one expects from this label, not at all. The song is a chaste little devotional murmured Chills-style, but what really surprises is the lustrous scree of guitars, the snow blindness of the minds' eye they induce. This is closer to AR Kane, Live Skull, Wire or even McGeoch-era Banshees than the usual Creation constellation of influences. Somehow The House Of Love have extracted a way to be different from a seam of sound I'd thought all but exhausted. *MM Apr 23*

Transvision Vamp
I Want Your Love MCA

I mean, what is the point? Please, tell me. "Irony", I hear. "Wit", I hear? A girl peroxides her hair, three blokes put on leather jackets and come on all surly and I'm supposed to be rolling in the aisles! This is *pathetic pastiche*, playing around with rock symbols that nobody but denim advertisers even use any more and it is an absolute disgrace that they are, or ever were, taken remotely seriously, or worse, found "amusing" by anybody. Even if there were a trace of wit about TV, they would still be pernicious because this is *no time for jokes*. Even the punters know it. *MM, June 11*

Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds
The Mercy Seat MUTE

A timeless, watery swirl of organs, a guitar chasing its own tail and, at the eye of it all, Nick Cave presenting us not with a moral dilemma but a moral maelstrom. "The Mercy Seat" is the electric chair, and Cave's protagonist is caught in that familiar mortal coil that links the base with God, by which spiralling logic every condemned man is a martyr, nailed up alongside Christ. This song literally rotates in your head, especially as it moves up towards its crescendo, as the moment of truth arrives, heralded by Blixa Bargeld's shock electric bolt of guitar. This cyclical construction is a masterstroke as Cave's own value-system is a circuit, without beginnings or ends, with truth, Jesus, death. Without being studied, it has a galloping, urgent, epic feel that's faintly reminiscent of the bigger sort of '60s pop. A magnificent, disgusted, imaginative leap outside the times. *MM June 11*



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NEED ANY BACK ISSUES? SEE PAGE 144

Readers' letters

MM/NME JAN–JUN Postmodernism, Mozophilia, Braggitis and other hot topics.

You say "tomato"...

I was completely bewildered by recent letters to the *Maker* complaining about the complex nature of the writing in the paper. Can't these cretins see that the joy of the writing of Reynolds, Stubbs, Oldfield is that it can never get "too cerebral"? That it can never go too far? These are writers who use words to take us to the outer limits.

They unashamedly rejoice in the use of language to attempt to describe the indescribable; ie, that moment in pop when your feet leave the ground and you die a little death: Björk's scream, "Jusqu'au Bout," "If I Was Your Girlfriend". In short, these are people consumed by LOVE!

I for one am eternally grateful that they don't imitate the *NME* dullards and write (as Stubbs would put it) "like the next man's piss in the Marquee".

So, all you legions of *MM* postmodernists – onwards and upwards and don't you dare stop.

ALBERT TATLOCK (*MM* Feb 20)

...I say "post-tomato"

What a relief! Has someone finally sacked that university self-contemplative arsehole Simon Reynolds? Then again, last week's *Maker* wasn't half as hilarious or tear-jerking without the incredible "insight" of the Oxford graduate. If he is still employed (sack the bastard), is it grounded upon the old ethic of "any reaction is better than none at all"? For at least the incredulous reaction his live reviews (eg, Me, The World, And The Cult, Live, Existing WITHOUT themselves, Blissfully Unaware So INVERTING Pop's lattice) instil in the nation is more worthy of our attention than bald Steve Sutherland's "mature" wankings over geeks like The Cure (the student, can't dance, dickhead band) and no-hopers like The Primitives. What an arselicker this man is! And an interesting fact is that Prince now braids the hairs up his arse. Interesting for Steve to get his nose up there, and Simon to analyse the significance of such pop iconism in the general "world view" scheme of things (postmodernistically dada).

JOHN ANDREWS (*MM* Feb 27)

Help from my "wanker" friends

Oh for God's sake will you lot shut up about Wet Wet Wet and Billy Bragg having a No 1 record thanks to *NME*. Who do you think you are, Mother Teresa of Calcutta? You are the ones who moaned about all the backslapping caused by charity records, and now you are doing exactly the same.

You ought to be ashamed for giving a teenybopper bunch of wankers like Wet Wet Wet free publicity. It's been proved that charity records increase the general sales of bands' records and that record companies fight tooth and nail to get their bands into the charity game because of the publicity value.

I for one refuse to buy charity records, because they are a music industry con. You have fuck all to be proud about.

AN ANARCHIST, Lewisham (*NME* Jun 11)

Right on, sister

Little do you ageing liggers know that Billy Bragg is the thinking schoolgirl's crumpet. When I go to his gigs there are always loads of girls chatting him up as he is cuddly and approachable. I would share a cup of cocoa over a Woody Guthrie or even Van Morrison LP with him anytime. Does *NME* arrange blind dates?

A DIRTY-FINGERNAILED 15-YEAR-OLD FAN, Streatham (*NME* Jun 18)

Irony maiden

Lay off Morrissey. Why? Because he's my hero. I've got a big quiffy haircut and a pair of NHS specs and when my dog died I buried it out in the back and made a small wooden cross so that I can sit out there in the snow and contemplate the work of Oscar Wilde.

I've seen every film James Dean was ever in, and have recently acquired every record Sandie Shaw ever made. I've watched *A Taste Of Honey* over 200 times, and when my mother tells me off for attending the funerals of complete strangers I just answer, "Fuck off, Mother, I've got to live my own life."

You see, that's what being a Smiths fan is all about. Doing your own thing. We don't believe in following society's plan, we don't want to be just a cog in the big machine. We are individuals and no one tells us what to do. So, don't slag off Morrissey; he is a brave man who has given many of us less brave guys the courage to be ourselves. The courage to wear our glasses with pride, to gate-crash wakes, to quote Oscar Wilde in our long, tedious letters to *Melody Maker*. The courage to get on people's tits and to listen to a record with as mind-bendingly controversial a title as *The Queen Is Dead*. And with that I must end, for "*the sky is laced with fitful red, the circling mists and shadows flee*". Ah, how good it makes me feel to know I'm a one-off.

Yours faithfully...

MR S, 27 years old (*MM* May 26)

Life's not too good

I just read in the June 4 issue that The Sugarcubes were denied work permits by our wonderfully hip Dept Of Immigration, thus cancelling their first trip to these shores. What is this shit? I mean, Iceland lets us send our spastic old commander-in-chief to prop up the Cold War thaw with Mickey G last year. The least we could do is let them send the divine Björk and co over here so we can have a glimpse of the Viking wunderkind in the flesh.

Real USA choice, how you say, BOLLOCKS! I'm going to vote for Jesse Jackson now.

BOB LEECH, an enraptured cubist, Roselle Park, New Jersey, USA (*NME* Jun 25)

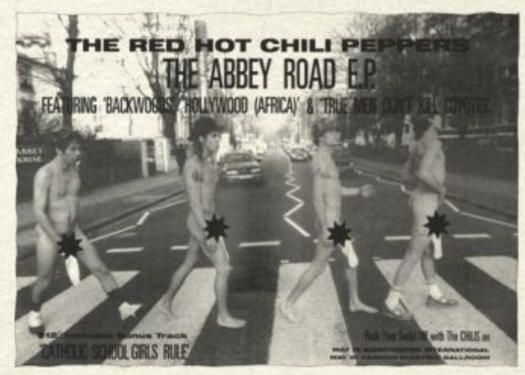
Chart of the matter

Just a note to say that I think the Top 40 is in the best shape it's been in for three years. OK, so we have a high new entry from Rick Astley, but this week he's been beaten into the ground by "Suedehead". We've also had new entries by Coldcut, The Primitives, The Sisters, Bomb The Bass and LL Cool J in recent weeks. All these are indicative of the resurgence in good music that we've been waiting for so long.

OK, it can get better, but let's stop moaning and start grooving.

PS: Do you think The Mission are The Alarm in disguise?

ANON (*MM* Mar 12)



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1988

JULY – SEPTEMBER

THE HOUSE OF LOVE, ACID HOUSE, MICHAEL JACKSON AND MORE

"It's just so sad"

MM JULY 9 RIP, Red Hot Chili Peppers guitarist Hillel Slovak, dead at 25.

HILLEL SLOVAK, GUITARIST with the Red Hot Chili Peppers, has died in Los Angeles after taking an overdose of heroin. Hillel, 25, a founder member of the band, was found dead at his home on Monday June 20, and the funeral took place last week. The tragedy happened in the week that the group, formed in LA four years ago, were due to begin work on a new album.

An EMI spokesman said: "Hillel will be remembered for his contributions both to the Red Hot Chili Peppers' music and to contemporary funk guitar."

Sources close to the band have stressed that the overdose was not intentional. The guitarist had never made a secret of his involvement with heroin. When the group were last interviewed by *Melody Maker* in May, he spoke frankly, off the record, about the problems that his heroin abuse had caused within the band. He was making an effort to clean up and was in good spirits.

One friend at EMI said: "It's so sad. Everything had just started to go well for the band. They'd had a few weeks off after being on the road for over a year, and they'd got themselves girlfriends and apartments. Hillel did tend to get depressed, but when I spoke to him a few weeks ago, he was fine. He said he'd had such a good time in Europe and was looking forward to coming back. The rest of the band are in deep shock."

Drugs was the only problem which ever threatened the band's career. Vocalist Antoine The Swan told the *Maker* that he had only managed to kick his habit after getting himself into such a state that he was almost sacked. Antoine and bassist Flea, the band's main songwriting team, intend to carry on, with drummer Jack Irons, as The Red Hot Chili Peppers.

JOE DILWORTH / GETTY

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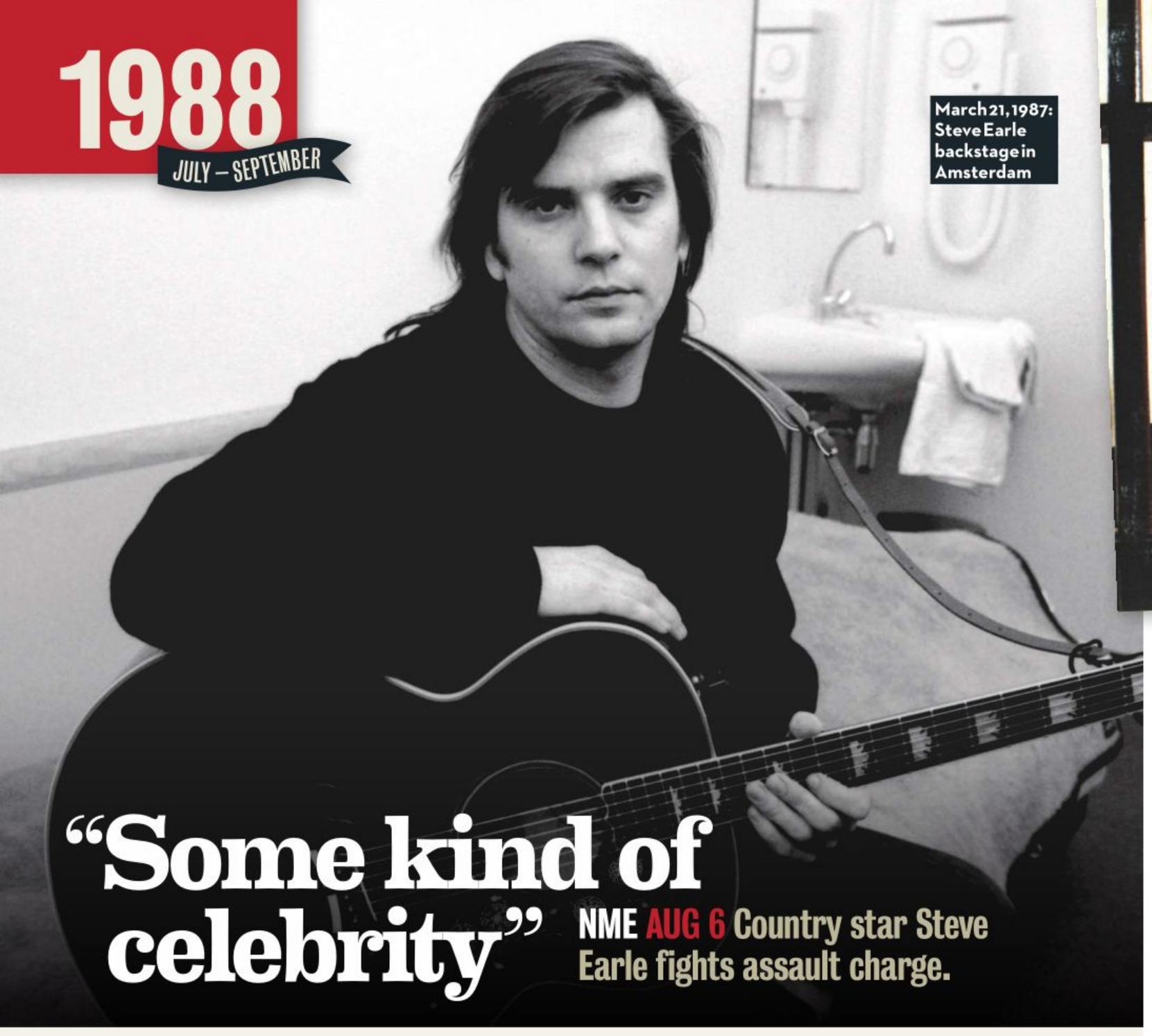
May 1, 1988: Red Hot Chili Peppers guitarist Hillel Slovak (right) with bassist Flea backstage at the Bayou in Washington DC during the Uplift Mofo Party Tour



March 21, 1987: Steve Earle backstage in Amsterdam

"Some kind of celebrity"

NME AUG 6 Country star Steve Earle fights assault charge.

STEVE EARLE IS preparing for a showdown with Dallas police, who have charged him with assaulting an off-duty officer. The country star, whose latest single "I Ain't Never Satisfied" has just been released, risks imprisonment by fighting the charge, but is keen to throw a spotlight on the high level of police brutality in the city.

"If this had happened to anyone else they wouldn't have stood a chance fighting it," Earle told the *NME*. The prisons of Texas are probably full of poor blacks and Hispanics who have been the victims of violence by the Dallas police, and have had no means to defend themselves.

"When I was first charged, the police tried to do a deal with me, saying if I pleaded guilty they would make sure I had a reduced sentence. When they found out I was some kind of celebrity it shook them up a bit."

The charges stem from an incident in a Dallas nightclub on New Year's Eve when Earle was allegedly attacked from behind by Lonnie Allen, an off-duty policeman moonlighting as a bouncer at the club. Earle was rendered unconscious and woke up in a cell to find himself charged with assault.

The case was due to be heard last week, but has been put back to September so that Earle and his solicitors can prepare more medical evidence. Earle is planning to tour Britain in October to promote his forthcoming album *Copperhead Road*, and is confident that he will win his case and be able to fulfil his commitments.

"I suppose I am taking a risk in fighting the charges. Even if I'm not jailed I could have a probation order against me which would stop me from leaving America. But I feel it's important to expose the way the Dallas police work. My trial will get a lot of publicity and hopefully will help other people in the future.

"Dallas and Philadelphia police departments have the worst records in the country for assaults against members of the public, and the cop involved in my case has been in trouble numerous times.

"He has become a liability to the police department and they want him out because he's costing them a lot of money in compensation cases. They want to get rid of him quietly with no fuss, but a well-publicised trial like mine will bring everything into the open."

"This guy held the nightstick against my throat so I couldn't breathe. I passed out"

Earle said his defence stems on the claim that Allen used a night-stick on him. The weapon, like a large truncheon, is illegal in the States.

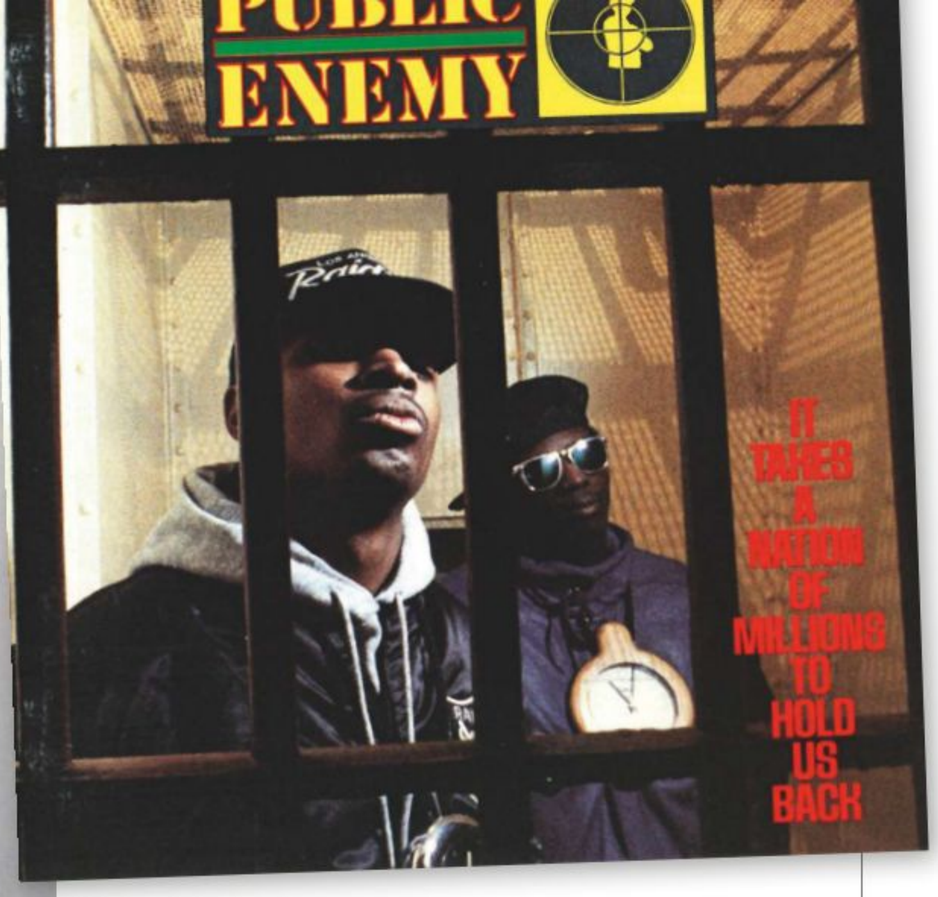
"This guy held the nightstick against my throat so that I couldn't breathe. I passed out and fell on top of him and that's what he claims is the assault.

"The police are claiming there was no nightstick involved, but I'm working on that. There were other people in the club who saw what happened, so I think my defence is pretty good."

At worst, Earle faces 10 years in jail. If the charge is reduced to resisting arrest, the latest plea bargain put forward by the police, he could be heavily fined and put on probation.

"I did not resist arrest, I passed out. I didn't know what happened. I want a full acquittal to clear my name and to try and stop this happening to others in the future."

DAVID CORIO / GETTY



Produced by Rick Rubin

NME JULY 16 Public Enemy to unveil second album, plan UK return.

PUBLIC ENEMY RELEASE their long-awaited second album, *It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back*, on Monday. The 18-track collection, which runs for a full hour, includes the current hit "Don't Believe The Hype", plus the previous singles "Rebel Without A Pause" and "Bring The Noise". The LP is on Def Jam and was produced by label supremo Rick Rubin. Public Enemy are currently on a lengthy US tour, opening for Run DMC, and could well be back playing live in Britain in late September.

A new collaborator

NME JUL 16 Morrissey said to have split with co-writer Stephen Street.

MORRISSEY AND STEPHEN Street are rumoured to have parted company, leaving the enigmatic Steven Patrick looking for a new collaborator.

Parlophone Records, who release Morrissey product, say they are not aware of any parting of the ways, but the *NME* has heard whispers of the split from a number of independent sources. Street hinted that the relationship might be short-lived in *NME*'s recent exclusive interview.

Street first worked with Morrissey and The Smiths on the single "Heaven Knows I'm Miserable Now" in 1984, and has either engineered or produced almost everything since. The split, if true, now raises the question of Morrissey's future songwriting partner. One name that has been floated is that of The Communards' Richard Coles.

The two met recently during the recording of Sandie Shaw's new album, and although Morrissey's dislike of Jimmy Somerville's voice has been well documented, the two are now strong friends.

Morrissey/Street: 'I know it's over'

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"Inroads towards rehabilitation"

NME AUG 13 Nick Cave busted, enters rehab.

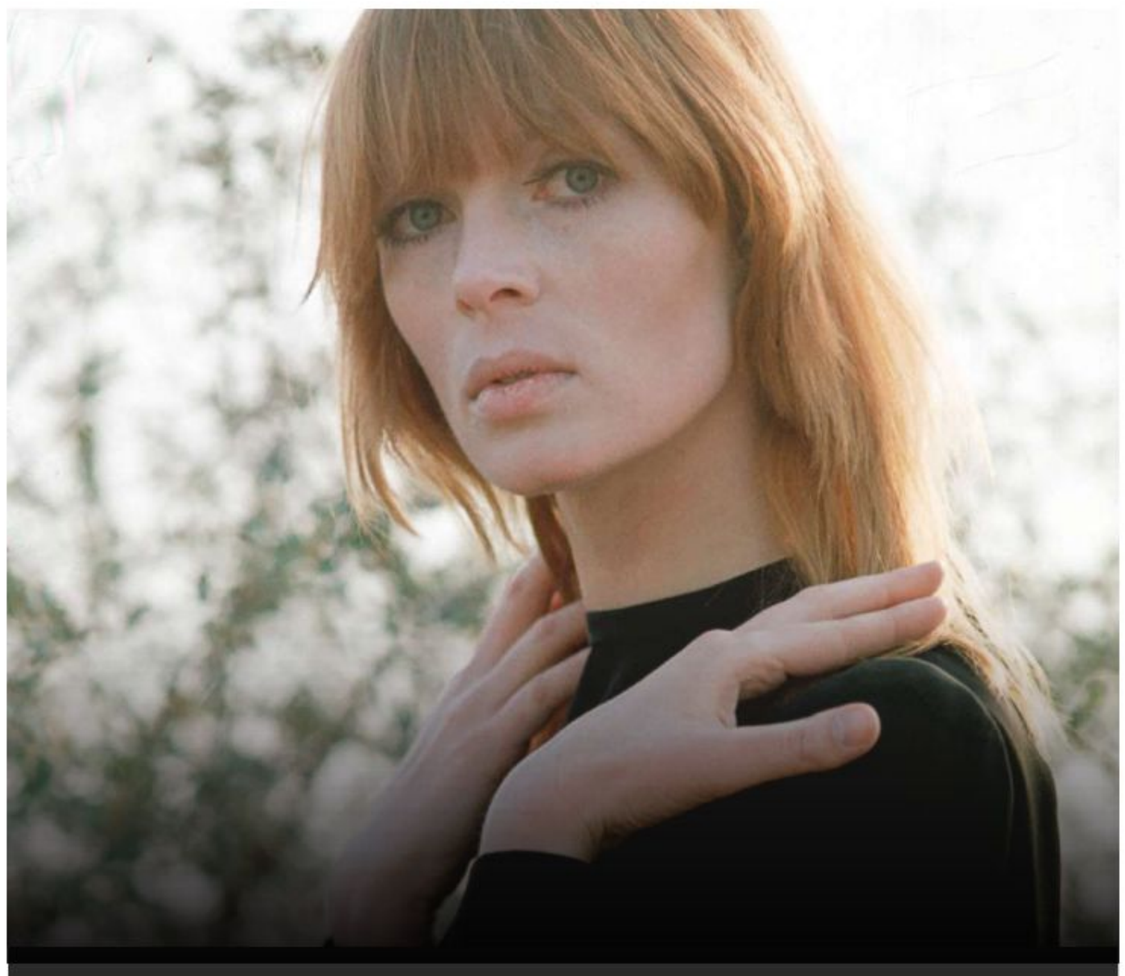
NICK CAVE ENTERED a drugs rehabilitation clinic last Thursday, just two days after a court appearance on a heroin possession charge. Cave, 30, pleaded guilty to possessing 884 milligrams of the drug, with a street value of about £100, when he appeared at Great Marlborough Street Magistrates Court, London.

He was given a conditional discharge for 18 months and ordered to pay £15 court costs. His solicitor, Brian Spiro, said that Cave admitted having a drug problem and was about to start a six- to eight-week residential course at a Somerset clinic for detoxification, followed by psychological counselling.

The offence took place in January, when Cave was at Marylebone Police Station being questioned on another matter. He was subsequently cleared of an initial offence, but was found to be in possession of heroin.

Mr Spiro told the court that Cave tried to register with a doctor for treatment immediately on his return to the UK from Australia, but had difficulty because he had no permanent address: "It was during this difficult period that Mr Cave bought the heroin. While he was endeavouring to legitimise his situation, he was desperately in need."

The court was told that Cave, "a musician employed by a record company and earning £5,000 a year", had been convicted on a similar charge by Uxbridge magistrates in February of last year, and fined £120.

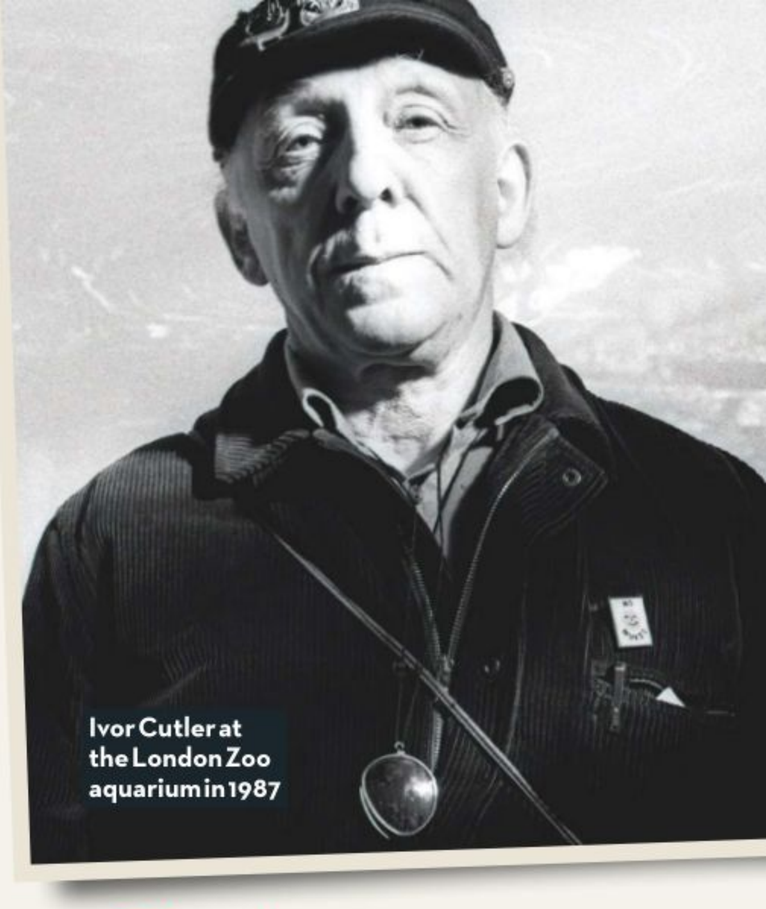


Memorial service

NME AUG 6 RIP, German singer-songwriter Nico.

A MEMORIAL SERVICE IS to be held for Nico, who died from a brain haemorrhage in Ibiza two weeks ago. The remembrance service, which will include readings from friends and music, takes place at St John's Church, Holmfirth, on August 6. Anybody who was fond of her, or who knew her, and feel that they should be present is welcome to attend.

THE MATERIAL WORLD OF... IVOR CUTLER



Ivor Cutler at the London Zoo aquarium in 1987

NME JUL 16 Life in Ivor Cutler's Scotch sitting room.

Loves
People with whom one feels at peace.
Feeling hopeful.
A person who walks beautifully.
The concerned.
Elaine Morgan, for her book *The Descent Of Woman*.

Hates
People who feel they have the God-given right to play music when, where and as loud as they choose.
The noise of motorbikes, electric mowers, electric drills, saws, sanders, helicopters, TVs, radios.
The inflexible mind.
Commercials.
Parasites.

Likes
Fresh air.
Silence.
An original mind.
People who, in their forties, search out their creative capacities.
Real modesty (rare).
Natural courtesy.

Dislikes
Macho.
Lifemanship.
An ugly voice.
Aggression.
Women who smell of hair lacquer, deodorant or too much scent.
Bigots.
High heels.
Professional sport.
Sexism.

Toni Morrison

TV programmes
Threw my telly out years ago.

Sex Symbols
Karl Malden, Oskar Homolka, Oliver Hardy, Albert Einstein

Painters
Miro, Morandi, Klee

Sculptors
Moore, Hepworth, Craig Murray-Orr, Ghisha Koenig

Books
Marilyn Robinson – *Housekeeping*, Toni Morrison, Asa Benveniste – *Pommes Poems*, Phyllis King – *Dust* and *Close Views*, Diringer – *The Alphabet*, Jane Bowles – *2 Ordinary Women*

Cartoonists
Leunig, Kliban, Larson, Honeysett

What would you do if you ruled the world?
1 I would fix the birth rate at one per family till the population stabilised at one million.
2 I'd dis-invent electricity so that music would be acoustic and singers would have to learn to project their voices.
3 I'd hire Jonathan Porritt of Friends Of The Earth and give him carte-blanche.
4 I'd hold a competition for a word or one syllable which meant man or woman.
5 I'd consult with Dale Spender on changing the language so that it's sexually neutral.
6 Teaching would be the top profession, with teachers worthy of the name, and the cream in the nursery and infants, using AS Neill's principles.
7 Love would cease to be a dirty word.
8 Teenagers would be obliged to travel the world to lose their chauvinism.
9 Euthanasia would be legal.
10 The bicycle would be the means of transport.

STEVE RICHARDS / REX / SHUTTERSTOCK; STEVE SPELLER / ALAMY; RON GALELLA / GETTY; MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES / GETTY

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“A scene out of a scene”

Long hair, drugs, hypnotic music… Welcome to the ’80s Summer Of Love! From a spiritual home in Ibiza, a new wave of club DJs, technology and drugs give rise to ACID HOUSE. It is, one pioneer explains, an inclusive scene. “We’re hoping everybody can get into it.”

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Opening in June 1988, DJ and producer Nicky Holloway's The Trip night at the Astoria brings acid house to London's West End

GETTY

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1988

JULY – SEPTEMBER

— NME JULY 16 —

IT'S THREE IN the morning outside the Astoria on London's Charing Cross Road and something very strange is happening. A car, which is blaring out acid house from its radio, has been surrounded by about 20 people who have emerged, sweating and delirious from a night at The Trip, Nicky Holloway's one-off club at the venue.

Some of the revellers are climbing onto the car roof, while others are dancing to the freak-beats in the middle of the road, completely unaware that they are causing a massive traffic jam all the way down the street…

Welcome to the world of acid house and Balearic beats, the music and lifestyle that's going to dominate the rest of the year!

Nobody is quite sure as to the true origins of the title given to this form of house. Many believe it came from Phuture's "Acid Trax" single. Others, like in-demand producer Todd Terry, think it derives from the slang "burning", which means to steal from someone else's record. But whatever its root, acid house – characterised by offbeat sounds and a relentless driving rhythm – emanated from Chicago as a natural progression from the other house forms (deep house, washing machine or jackin' house) and thrives on a patent weirdness and disregard for conventional structure or form.

Its popularity in clubs stems from its incessant freak-beat, to which DJs add the now-mandatory FX of strobes and dry-ice clouds to heighten the music's hypnotic pulse. Acid house one-nighters are springing up from Glasgow to Brighton. But the biggest concentration of clubs is in London – 10 at the last count and increasing by the week. All are the result of a vacation that four DJs took last September to Ibiza…

Visiting clubs like Amnesia and Koo, they were taken aback by the way local jocks were mixing in the usual dance beats with the most unexpected tracks. So, amazingly, The Woodentops' "Why?" or the Thrashing Doves' "Jesus On The Payroll" were being played to massive popular response. These resultant records – "the type" according to DJ Steve Proctor, "you dance to at four in the morning and go mad over" – took their generic name from the island group of which Ibiza is a part. Hence was born Balearic beats.

On their return to London, one of the DJs, Danny Rampling, found a suitable venue and started the Shoom club. Intended as a reunion jam for the Balearic veterans, Shoom's reputation soon spread and it quickly became a major success. Other clubs swiftly sprang up in its wake: Love, at the Wag, the Limelight's Elysium, Future at The Sanctuary, Planet Love at The Fridge, and perhaps most mind-boggling of all, Spectrum, which is hosted by DJ Paul Oakenfold at Heaven.

Though it's hardly a matter for public broadcast, there's no denying that hallucinogenic drugs, especially ecstasy, are a central component of this scene. A designer/cocktail drug, "E" not only allows the user the energy to dance for six or seven hours on the trot but also relaxes inhibitions and makes people far more friendly, thus adding to a club's popularity.

Obviously not everyone who is into acid house uses ecstasy, any more than everyone who likes reggae smokes ganja, but there is a definite return to the ideas of the hippie '60s and early '70s among these club-goers. The yellow smiley logo is the most recurrent symbol, while T-shirts with old slogans such as "Tune In, Turn On, Drop Out" are worn with beat-up Converse baseball boots, baggy old jeans and increasingly long hair. You can be sure it's the first time hippies have danced in a club…

And the sartorial parallel with the late '60s and early '70s is matched by a musical one. In the hippie era essentially "ethnic" idioms – the blues, rock'n'roll and Indian ragas – were stretched and distorted into altered states of psychedelia by white musicians high on dope. Today, in Britain at least, a similar process is happening: the black sound of Chicago – house – is being culturally adapted by whites high on hope.

Some of these musicians are well known, such as Douglas Hart of the Mary Chain, who operates with The Acid Angels, ex-Soft Celler Dave Ball, who's involved with MESH, and Genesis P Orridge, who's behind Mistress Mix. Others, like Baby Ford, are newcomers on the scene. And this is only a trickle of acid house compared with the flood that's to come…

This, together with the thriving clubs, has led to grumbles on the part of acid house veterans that "You can't hear the music for the noise of people jumping on the bandwagon!" What's beyond controversy, however, is the fact that the energy on the scene is palpable. Douglas Hart compares it to the early days of punk.

"Punk taught kids that they didn't need to be a virtuoso to make great music," he says. "A couple of chords was enough. Now you don't even need that skill, just the ability to push a few buttons on cheap samplers, synths and drum machines."

That there isn't already a massive acid house fanzine scene is partly down to the anonymity of the idiom. It's rarely performed live, which is why the DJs who play the sounds in clubs have a higher profile than the musicians who make them.

DJ Danny Rampling recreates the sound of Ibiza in London SE1, launching the seminal Shoom club in November 1987

GETTY

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Interestingly, this anonymity is reflected inside the music itself. The emphasis in acid house is on instrumental passages, while "lyrics" tend to consist of the odd chopped slogan or chant. But, again, this is changing. Conventional hooklines are increasingly evident, commercial bait as new British acid house groups look to the charts with hungry eyes.

TAKING ACID HOUSE to the nation was always going to be a cinch for someone like Nicky Holloway, a young entrepreneur with the necessary dosage of ego, charm and determination, coupled with an instinctive nose for what gives and what doesn't.

Over the last four or five years, within the vicious, backbiting jungle that has been created by the unprecedented demand for clubs, Holloway has slowly but surely built his own patch, and guarded it zealously. Nowadays, the dividends are being reaped. His latest venture, the acid house night at the Astoria, which goes under the suitable name of The Trip, has been witness to some crazy scenes.

Every week, hundreds upon hundreds of people congregate outside its doors, desperately seeking entry. Those lucky enough to squeeze in past the harassed bouncers usually head straight for the dancefloor, and what's more, they stay there.

Based on the Shoom club before it, The Trip is wildness on a large scale, where acid house and Balearic beats dominate the sound system all night long, and dancers move in their own stylised fashion, vigorously imitating the style brought back from the dancefloors of Ibiza.

London hasn't seen this kind of energy since the punk clubs, and within The Trip the atmosphere is like a pressure valve just waiting to burst nationwide. One of the ways in which it will do that is through a record entitled "Sure Beats Working" by a group named Beats Working.

The main part of the song many will recognise. It's the theme tune from *The Old Grey Whistle Test*, first performed by the group Area Code 615. It has been aligned to a mild acid house bass and drum line, with a wilder remix about to emerge from the Stock, Aitken & Waterman stable.

And the men behind it? Let's take a trip to Ibiza…

There, Maggot is about to bring down Gilles Peterson with the kind of tackle that would make a Millwall defender blush and leave the DJ's ribcage bruised and his pristine knees bloody. Bernie can't get the bells that open up Finitribe's "Let The Tribe Grow" out of his head. Wendell's by the pool, his muscular black body shaking in convulsions to a tape of Bernard Manning's jokes, while every DJ in town is frantically scouring the Ibizan record shops for a new Balearic beat record.

Round about five o'clock this afternoon, everyone will head off to the Café Del Mar to watch the Ibizan sun slowly sink into the sky. It's an island tradition that has grown over the years, and Nicky Holloway is well acquainted with the custom.

For the last few years, he's been bringing his Special Branch organisation to Ibiza for a summer break. This consists of a rota of such respected DJs as Pete Tong, Giles Peterson, Chris Bangs, Bob Jones, plus Holloway himself, all of whom attract a very loyal crowd to their events.

Throughout the '80s that crowd has grown in size, because the Special Branch is light miles away from the cliched image of the British soulboy and girl of the '70s.

At Special Branch occasions, you won't find people throwing beer or shaving foam over each other. Nor will you find a restrictive music policy. In one night, you're likely to hear within 10 minutes of each other The Thrashing Doves' "Jesus On The Payroll", Public Enemy's "Don't Believe The Hype", Clarence Wheeler & The Enforcers' "Right On" and The Jacksons' "Shake Your Body Down To The Ground".

Mix this with the crowd's cool and friendly attitude and the difference between this and the kind of soul weekenders that have gone before approaches the differences between English and Irish football fans abroad.

"There was a breed of my age group," explains Holloway, nursing a drink and flanked by his two musical companions, swarthy George Giorgiou and Doug, a babyface in comparison, "soulboys if you like, who didn't want to be with the others, so we formed a scene out of a scene. It wasn't a mega-trendy scene, but slowly we got people to realise that it wasn't just a load of wanky soulboys, but that anybody could get into it.

"With music, you've got to accept all the new styles that come along and add it to what you like. The others worry too much about the ethics of music, whereas I don't worry how a record is made, or who makes it. It's the noise that comes out of the speaker, and I hope I can always manage to move with what's happening."

> "You just need to push a few buttons on samplers and synths"

After watching DJs such as Chris Hill ("the most entertaining DJ in Britain when he wants to be") at events like the Caister weekend, Holloway got the bug for DJ-ing, and started landing minor spots at minor places.

Eventually he ended up at a London pub called The Royal Oak and started pulling a regular crowd. "Mark Webster thought up the name – oak, trees, branch, Special Branch – and during that time I started to do our alternative weekenders and warehouse parties. We started finding more venues, like London Zoo, and putting on things there. It was never really sat and planned out."

The Special Branch carved themselves out a niche by approaching things from a new angle. At one weekender, they put on the successful play *Bouncers* before the night's main activities, while Holloway has always employed a team of designers and lighting people to redesign any venues they played. It was here that he met two designers, Doug and George, who both suggested to him that he should start making records.

"I always said to Nicky," says George, "why don't you do compilations? All the other DJs seem to get into that. Then when all those DJ records started, I told him he was mad not to do one."

Once in a band called Naughty Culture (who ironically appeared on *The Old Grey Whistle Test* in their very short lifespan), Doug told Nicky that the tape of acid house he was carrying around with him was easy to emulate. Having heard the Area Code 615 record (which contains the *Whistle Test* theme) being heavily played in Ibiza, Holloway and the two designers put two and two together and found the perfect formula.

"It started for me as, 'Let's make a club record,'" Holloway recalls, "and what happened was that it turned out to be such a catchy record that it's turned into something else. We were all saying let's do it for a laugh, but deep down there was this little glimmer of hope that wouldn't it be great if we could crack it as well. I've always wanted to be on *Top Of The Pops*." Since the year dot, I've always fancied being a pop star.

Naturally, Holloway had a tailor-made crowd to test his attempts out on. Within two plays at the Rockley weekender, "Sure Beats Working" had become a signature tune for the Special Branch crowd.

"It was a bit strategic the way I played it," Nicky admits, "because I made sure that I played something the crowd liked just before it so they all danced, I wasn't going to play it cold. At that weekend it turned out to be the biggest record and we got loads of feedback on it."

They also got a record deal out of Pete Tong, one of the Special Branch DJs who works as an A&R man for London Records. Admitting to gross charges of nepotism, Tong now says, "I suppose I signed them because Nicky's a friend, but now it looks as if they're going to have a massive hit with it, which, at the time, was completely unexpected."

The frenzied way in which most people have taken to acid house this summer has ensured that George, Doug and Nicky are now ideally placed to take advantage of the phenomenon.

"It's not a funk record," Holloway asserts, "it's not a disco record and it's not a house record. It doesn't fit into any form of music, and we're hoping that it'll be something like Chaka Khan's 'Ain't Nobody', which you can play at the Café De Paris, a suburban soulboy gig and a German tourist club, because everybody can get into it."

"I mean, after all," Holloway adds, his eye permanently attuned to the catchy headline, "this is the first homegrown Balearic beat record."

As the Ibizan sun shrinks from view, and *The Old Grey Whistle Test* rolls in its grave, the smiles on Sure Beats Working's faces resemble nothing more than that of the ubiquitous smiley logo… *Paolo Hewitt* •

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“This is not music. This is a trip!”

Spurned by America, PRINCE brings his Lovesexy Tour to Europe. On the record: faith, sex and salvation. On stage: electrifying performance and a floating car. Never mind Marvin, Sly or Little Richard – is Prince actually closer to God?

— MELODY MAKER JULY 23 —

THE PALAIS OMNISPORT, on the south-east flank of Paris, is the site for the launch of Prince’s 1988 world tour. It’s clear that Prince and the French have a thing for each other, and there are rumours that Prince may be upping sticks and moving his entire Paisley Park operation to Paris. America’s lukewarm reaction to *Lovesexy* (it’s not even in the Billboard Top 15) has meant that so far the States have been left out of the tour; quite a pretty pass when you consider that *Purple Rain* was, in its day, one of the 10 best-selling albums of all time.

In the dead centre of the stadium, Prince has built himself a little fantasy island. With its cloud patterns, bizarre props reminiscent of *The Clangers* and a *Close Encounters*-style light show, Prince creates an asteroid of bliss. Here, *le petit prince* can indulge his every whim and fantasy, ranging from soft porn to Mills & Boon.

He makes his entrance perched on a car that seems to be cruising in mid-air and it’s only in the intermission, when the lights return, that I see the mammoth hydraulic system behind this splendid illusion.

Then the madness begins. Prince is a blur, pirouetting, flouncing along a drawbridge to tease the audience, wheelbarrow-walking Sheila E by her legs, whizzing through Cat’s legs in a curious inversion of the Teddy-boy norm and emerging the other side with her skirt between his teeth. As a visual spectacle, it’s as histrionic and palsied as “Housequake”, a Clintonesque spurting of folly. The pace changes with the ballad “Slow Love” – the cue for a constellation of lighters held aloft in the stadium. The line “*The man in the moon is smiling*” is literalised with the kind of pat gesture normally the preserve of video-makers: an arc-lamp shone through a lace canopy, making for an ersatz, indoor full moon.

“Adore” is diminished somewhat in comparison with the vinyl version, where, against all the odds, Prince’s multi-tracked voice makes soul an annihilating experience. Yet the light system wins through, miraculously sowing the air with aurora borealis. Beams of light refract as though passing through a prism suspended in thin air, turning into ectoplasmic whorls. Gorgeous.

Prince and his nine minions then embark on a furious journey through high spots of his back catalogue. “Jack U »

GETTY

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"A flagrant exhibitionism": Prince's elaborately staged Lovesexy Tour reaches the Netherlands for three dates at Rotterdam's Feijenoord Stadium, August 17–19, 1988

WorldMags.net

Off" from the *Controversy* album is horrible old rock'n'roll, after which Prince disappears into an under-stage lair to change costume while his troupe of merry men career into one of those florid, horn-driven workouts.

"Sister" (the one about incest) is a ludicrously manic punk-funk blur, over before you properly register its arrival. It trails off into a wake of Mahavishnu comet-tails and sunspots, which itself subsides into an Enoesque ambient drift. "All this is just to say, 'I wanna be your lover, baby,'" Prince says, as though amazed at himself. "This is not music. This is a trip!" A grill of light, as though shone through the bars of an enormous birdcage, rotates over the audience's face.

Prince wants to be Everything to Everyone. He wants to be all you could ever need. Musically, he's a pop polymath, flitting between funkadelia, acid rock, deep soul and schmaltz, sometimes within the same song. And his love songs return over and over to his fervent wish to satisfy each and every need, to live out all fantasies of his beloved.

But if Prince pleases, he never caters, never serv(ic)es. He's always pleasing himself, following his own wayward impulse. Even the pinnacle of his success to date was free from any taint of pondering. Compare "Purple Rain" with Michael Jackson's "Beat It" – Eddie Van Halen dropped plum in the middle as a calculated bid for MTV and the FM radio heartland. Yet when Prince rocks out, it's because that's as much a part of him as the funk strut.

The undeniable "something for everyone" crossover effect of *Purple Rain* garnered a huge, variegated audience, but subsequent albums, especially *Sign O' The Times* and *Lovesexy*, have seen Prince's cultural schizophrenia implode within individual songs, rather than express itself in versatility spread across the span of an album.

Sales and profits have dwindled to a fraction of their *Purple Rain* zenith because Prince is now demanding listeners who are as variegated inside as himself, and he's found there aren't too many people like that around. Tonight, the chosen ones reap their reward.

"U Got The Look" turns into an Anthrax shunt-and-pummel metal workout for no good reason, while Prince asks his guitar serfs to "round them girls up". The ensuing nonsensical interlude still troubles my brain. The guitarists circle around Sheila and Cat and AN Other like Red Indians attacking a wagon encampment, hemming them in with curious, vaguely intimidating thrusts of the pelvis. My jaw still sags in disbelief.

Prince's desire to be everything for somebody, the yearning for ultimate closeness, reached its lunatic peak in the schizophrenia of "If I Was Your Girlfriend": "*If I was your one and only friend, would U run to me if somebody hurt U, even if that person was me?*" The song's agony is that of the spirit chafing against the straitjacket of sexual identity. Sex for Prince isn't "communication" or "exchange", but more mystical, the dissolution of identities that makes communication possible.

Like Morrissey, Prince feels trapped by his sex, or rather the cultural assumptions vested in it. Prince confounds this. He will pursue like a panther and be coy prey, present himself as the subject of desire and the object of bliss, all within the same dance routine.

Everything comes in snippets now: "I Wanna Be Your Lover" with its crotch-clutch catch of anticipation in his voice; the pneumatic, mathematically horny "Head", Dr Fink squirting lubricious arcs of Moog through the air. But it's "When You Were Mine" that provides proof that Prince's touch can turn any genre to gold, even one as odious as skinny-tie power pop.

Prince has a near-pathological desire to escape the confining fixity of identity. Prince is not so much a persona as a space, in which he can become anything he or we want him to be. His desire is stretched across and broken over sexual/racial divides. His impulse is always to dissolve differences and borders.

He perforates so many categories they become irrelevant. Phrase like "the saviour of soul and R&B" are bandied out. Miles Davis has already described Prince's music as jazz; his use of electronics can be as minimal and futuristic as Front 242 or DAF, and at other times his intentions are patently psychedelic. Prince doesn't so much build bridges between categories as create music that exceeds such categories simultaneously. But perhaps the best tag for him is "hippy", in so far as it's now, for post-punk critics, a cipher for pretension, over-inflation and overreach. Prince is a hippy! This also covers his penchant for fusion and his dippy mystic positivism. Indeed, in his formative years he was influenced as much by Santana, Joni Mitchell, Todd Rundgren and Hendrix as by Sly Stone, Clinton or Earth Wind & Fire. And these black musicians were themselves all irretrievably shaped by the counterculture.

While his superstar peers make records with one ear cocked in anxious deference to pop currency, Prince alone behaves like an aristocrat, squandering the success he's earned rather than consolidating the estate with cautious measures. He also demands an aristocratic listener, one prepared to laze and gorge.

By his own account, Prince's adolescence was spent daydreaming (of sex, fame) in the basement where he also learned his multi-instrumental virtuoso skills. This little bubble of unreality has since expanded until now it enfolds the entire Paisley Park complex in Minneapolis.

Most pop is created in factory conditions, as a product made to satisfy specific consumer needs. Prince has been elevated by success to a level beyond that of a musician working for a living. He's often slammed for being a "spoilt child", because people distrust a music that is play as opposed to work. Post-punk criticism is still uneasy about music that isn't tied to a good intention, that isn't answerable to the community. But Prince has floated free to an aerial domain of licence and luxury, where he's instigated a promiscuous chaos of stylistic miscegenation.

His exquisite fleck and stutter of guitar is a coiled cobra in the belly, but tonight it's the off-the-cuff improvisations that turn me inside out – an excursion into panther-strut blues that would make Johnny Guitar Watson and Robert Cray weep with envy.

It's all here, in one delirious swirl of spectacle: "Little Red Corvette", "Pop Life", so bittersweet, a senseless interlude in which Prince tries to net a basketball by throwing it backwards over his shoulder (he fails, but it doesn't matter), "Controversy" and the insanely rutting "Dirty Mind", during which a bed levitates out of nowhere and Prince pushes Cat onto it for a little pantomime, only to end up bouncing up and down like a four-year-old dropping his jim-jams to show his bottom to the milkman.

Prince does to black music what Butthole Surfers do to rock – survey its length and breadth, take whatever seems to be delectable, regardless of its proper place in the narrative of pop, gather them all up and then let them loose with supreme disregard. Both Prince and the Buttholes play with sound in the most wanton fashion, disfigure, aggravate and dismember – so much more is done than is necessary for the purpose of communication. For Prince, it's not getting from the A to B of the song that counts, but the way of walking, the swagger.

Unlike the singer-songwriter creed, attention is always drawn away from the song to the person working it. There's a flagrant exhibitionism here, forcing any audience into the role of voyeur. With Prince it's like watching someone else watching themselves masturbate in front of a mirror.

After the bed scene, there's a preposterous piece, from *The Black Album*, involving the Voice Of God, a mimed girl-murder, psychedelic funk, vari-speeded voices and the Lord's Prayer. Utter disorientation. Prince disappears under the stage on a previously invisible heart-shaped trapdoor, only to re-emerge barely a minute later as the Valentine returns and ascends to the ceiling…

> "It's all here, in one delicious swirl of spectacle"

The two criticisms most often levelled at Prince are that a particular song is overdone (OTT) or that it's unrealised. But these accusations merely reflect the extent to which rock criticism is entrenched in the tradition of Anglo-American literary criticism, with its values of proportion, symmetry, restraint and economy – the importance of the narrative, the sequence of utterances, rather than the voluptuousness of the utterance itself. I like it when a Prince song is overwrought. A Prince song is never stifled by attention because every superfluous squiggle is a carnal appendage of the man's polyrhythmic perversity. I like his doodles, follies, ideas toyed with, then abandoned in impatience, the debris of a restless desire.

Following his grand re-entry, Prince lets loose the gentle devastation of the opening piano chords of "Anna Stesia". After a guitar solo that wrenches the sky there are geysers of cerise smoke, the *Clangers* stage props retreat under the stage and that's that. End of part one.

An hour and a half seemed to have gone like that, but though they obviously deserve and need a breather, the intermission, the complete illumination of the stadium in all its tawdriness, feels like a mistake, a falter in the dynamic thrust of the proceedings.

Prince's music is organised around two figures of overbearing influence. On the one hand, James Brown, whose shows made such

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a profound impression on the young Prince (he drills his musicians with the same dictatorial discipline). On the other, Hendrix the noble savage in dandy's finery, the free-ranging kaleidoscope improviser.

For all its Hendrix-derived elements of bravura free expression, Prince's music rarely loses touch with James Brown's locked groove of desire, mesmerising monotony and crude assertion of repetition. Discipline and dilettantism coexist, in mutual contradiction.

Another angle to this contradiction is the way Prince is torn between the urge to be naked and the desire to dress up. Hendrix, the wildman swathed in the fop's elegance, was again the prototype for this collision of natural primitivism and anti-natural decadence.

Every now and then we hear the odd carping voice whinge about Prince being overrated and how *Lovesexy* is a weak work. *Lovesexy* is, by a fair chalk, the most consistently entertaining Prince album yet. But if it is his strongest record to date, it's because its strength lies in coherence. There's none of the dazzling leaps or appalling lapses that gave the previous albums a dynamic range. There's nothing on *Lovesexy* as supersaturated as "Adore", as out-of-kilter as "Ballad Of Dorothy Parker", or as vacant and compulsive as "Hot Thing".

The songs on *Lovesexy* are full-bodied, throbbing, for sure, but the unnatural excitement of tissue, the swelling and morbid flush that characterise Prince's peaks, are nowhere to be seen. The dominant tone is one of jubilation, not the hysteria that makes me swoon in Prince.

Although compared to anyone else in pop that sells, *Lovesexy* is chock-a-bloc with risk and dare, by his own measure it has definitely been shaped with a measure of temperance. Perhaps a response to declining popularity after the erraticism of the three albums following *Purple Rain*.

The return to the stage for the second half sees some changes: Prince wears a black wig (looking embarrassingly like Terence Trent D'Arby), the *Clangers* shapes have been usurped by bizarre portals fashioned from material that resembles fishnet. The new album is run through methodically, the saucy, spry "O NO", "Alphabet Street" and "Glam Slam" with its pagoda riffs. Then the fishnet portals disappear beneath the stage, signalling the religious portion of the show.

"The Cross" is still astounding – gospel in the form of a raga blitz mid-way between Nazz, Hüsker Dü and The Byrds, all sitar curlicue and tabla blink. Yet it's "I Wish U Heaven", with its lace veils, harp breezes and lights that perform mid-air acrobatics before sweeping over a swooning audience, that has my eyes brimming and is where my cup runneth over.

Two songs that boldly declare that "Jesus Is Coming" and "God Is Alive" are accompanied by some of the most scorching, futuristic funk of the evening. "If you don't believe it now, you're in *big* trouble," Prince chides, and the searchlights of the Lord swoop back and forth across the crowd, peering into the dark crannies of guilty souls.

Yet despite the holy choruses, the role of Black Pop Statesman is a part Prince can't and/or won't slip into with ease. Throughout his career there have been calls for Prince to be a better role model, to make himself accountable to a community. Even now, there are those who mourn the fact that *Lovesexy* is not a *There's A Riot Goin' On* for the '80s. But Prince is either too frivolous or too religious for his flighty fancies to be pinned down to this discourse of responsibility and constructive intervention. His responses to the troubled present are either a retreat into the infantile security of reclusive hedonism or, particularly on *Lovesexy*, a wishy-washy, semi-mystical affirmation of the power of "positivity".

"Sign O' The Times" is like "What's Goin' On?" in that it's a pandemonium of anguished compassion in the face of the impending apocalypse, devoid of any real critique, let alone any programmatic approach to change, ultimately looking only toward some vague redemptive force of love. Fantastic songs both, but neither fit the erroneous '80s model of "political soul".

The fishnet portcullises rise from the dead, and we're back to the secular, returning to the throb and twitch of "Kiss". Shelia E unleashes a berserk drum solo that seethes in the bloodstream and brings the house down, all but literally, as Prince spirals off into electronically modulated scat. "When 2 R In Love" closes with the corniest of effects – a golden heart locket the size of a giant turtle which opens and closes.

Promoting the album finished, Prince finally remembers to pander: "Let's Go Crazy", "When Doves Cry", "Purple Rain" and "1999" follow in rapid succession and are in turn followed by a rapid exit.

July 9, 1988: Prince and his post-Revolution band kick off the Lovesexy Tour with four shows at the Palais Omnisport in Paris

ROB VERHORST / GETTY

There's an ovation the like of which I've never heard, not even for U2. The 10-minute peal of adulation doesn't dip or slacken until Prince returns, with "Positivity". The "YES" signs flash on cue, but the positivist prating is palatable because of the furious rump-thrust. And Prince disappears again, aboard his airborne automobile, in a shower of paper snowflakes.

The final encore is the party stomper "It's Gonna Be A Beautiful Night", all heft and swank, throb and sizzle, ferocious but antique. This is a humid, organic jam, all perspiration, exertion and bind-and-heave. It's not the Prince I care for, or care to remember. That would be Prince the future-funker, Prince the aristocrat hippy.

NEARLY HALF THE songs on *Lovesexy* explicitly expound Prince's rather nebulous ideas about salvation, and the rest of the album refers to a "new power", a positivism that is our answer to the problems of a world that's going to hell in a handbasket.

In the glow of this new power, erotic and spiritual love are somehow compatible. Prince seems to have overcome the antagonism between righteousness and desire that perplexed him before. Prince has always sacramentalised erotic love and eroticised religion – made God raunchy, made raunch your God. For him, religion and eroticism are interdependent. Pleasure only exists where there's a taboo, a limit to be overflown. As the lyric to "It" says: "*Feels so good / It must be a crime*."

I was thinking hard about why Prince pleasured me. It wasn't just the dizzying span between his moments of exquisite taste and his lapses into the crassest vulgarity and corn. It wasn't even the ultra-vivid hyper-sexual bliss induced by his exaggeration of the mannerisms of passion. There was something else. Then I remembered something Ian Penman wrote a long time ago in reference to both Prince and Michael Jackson: "The greatest singers die into their music."

There's something in Prince's voice. It's there all the time, but it comes out clearest when the dramatic inflections, subtle stresses and sympathetic accents are abandoned – when Prince swoons, when he's on the brink of insensibility. You can hear it on "It", where he sounds stricken, evacuated, annulled. Or on "Hot Thing", where his descending drone-chant of the title makes him sound like a machine, subjugated to the moronic sex-beat. Both tracks trail off into languishing shivers, cadaverous moans, metallic shudders.

If the whole business of eroticism is to destroy the self-contained character of the participants, then this loss of separateness is a kind of momentary death. This violently wrenched escape from "me" shakes our ordered, parsimonious and shuttered reality to the core. It's the loss of this sense of someone expiring, in the music, that I find so disappointing about today's mainstream pop, but more particularly disappoints me about *Lovesexy*, for all its splendours. This scream from a shattered soul is what really links Prince with Little Richard, and why we link Prince to the lost golden era of pop when that pandemonium was the norm, not a rare occurrence. When Prince is the master of all he sees, when everything he touches turns to gold, when he's the supreme seducer – that's when my admiration knows no bounds, that cool is why he towers in our imagination way, way above those meagre souls who statistically and fiscally dwarf him. But what sends me is not when Prince is captivating, but when he's captured, enslaved by desire, a thing even. That, paradoxically, is when Prince is truly God. *Simon Reynolds* •

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“Rock’n’roll ...I saw it born”

After years out of the spotlight raising a family, PATTI SMITH is back, writing with husband Fred “Sonic” Smith. “We’re human beings. We have tough times and wondrous times. We struggle together, we breeze together. It’s, er, a work in itself.

— MELODY MAKER AUGUST 6 —

“Got to lose control, and then you take control… Angel looks down at him, says, ‘Aw pretty boy, can’t you show me nothing but surrender?’ And Johnny gets UP…” *“Horses”, 1975*

MENACE AND PRAYER, like Jean Genet said, use menace and prayer…

“Mmm-hmm, I like that, I still like that…”

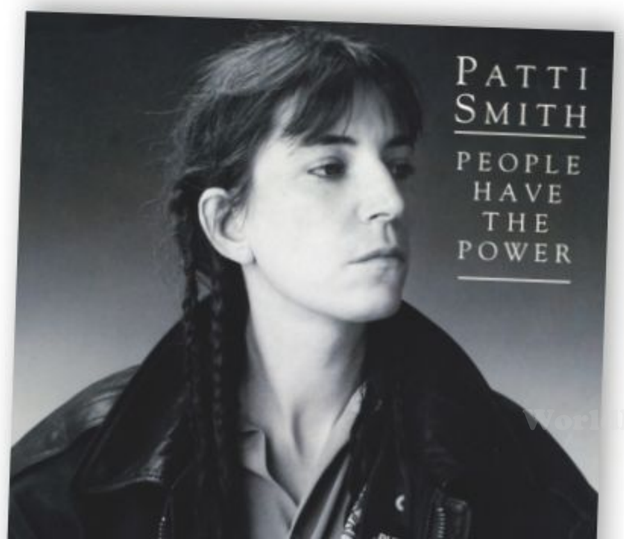
In Japan in 1977 Patti Smith said: “Everybody says it’s finished… art’s finished, rock’n’roll is dead, God is dead. Fuck that! This is *my* chance on the world. I’m right here now and I want now to be the greatest time. This is *my* Golden Age… If only each generation would realise that the time for greatness is right now when they’re alive…”

So, in 1988 is art alive? Is rock’n’roll alive?

“Well *I’m* alive, I’m still alive. And I’ve got two children in the world. Obviously, I believe in the power of the individual as well as the power of the collective, and there is always gonna be someone, y’know? It’s alive because there’s a new baby born that’s gonna make it alive 15 years from now. Or because someone else is gonna make it alive tomorrow. In art, the individual rules.”

I hear you prefer classical music these days?

“Some. Sometimes no music at all. It shifts. Might be into Coltrane. Might have a real hunger to hear »



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Patti Smith photographed in 1988 in Detroit, where she lives with her family in St Clair Shores about 12 miles north of the city

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'Purple Haze' or the desire to hear silence. The waves crashing. The sea. Be nice to be at the ocean now, wouldn't it?

"My feeling about rock'n'roll is… I saw it born, I was born in the late 1940s and saw the 1950s, saw Little Richard, saw the entrance of everything, all the different things it's been through. When I was younger in the early '70s I worried about it, I thought it was gonna disappear or dissolve or turn into glitter or something. But – it survived. With or without me, I'm sure it *will* survive, too. I'm not as preoccupied with it as I was, which was with a full heart. I'm not so concerned with it now, I think the new guard and younger people will take care of it. There is always someone, in all fields, who will come and break everything apart.

"I'll tell you, really, y'know, you're a writer, y'know, I've said a lotta stuff, you have your own points of view, I'll try to give you a few things, but – write your piece, y'know? You probably don't even need me really…"

That's not strictly true. But it is an absurd situation, isn't it?

"A little."

Surreal, even.

"Not surreal, just absurd. I don't have the same fascination with this… when I was younger I really enjoyed doing things, I loved the attention. But at this time of my life really I find it a little frivolous… If you were a mother you'd understand."

I'm not a mother, readers.

"Everything can be valuable if it's used right, but most of the time it's just a lot of indulgence."

So why have you re-entered the "vicious game"?

"Well, I'm doing a few things that I think are worthwhile, but I don't consider myself back in 'the game'. A few hours, and that's it. I'm really not interested in any game-plan 'career'. [Husband] Fred [Smith] and I are lucky we have an outlet for our work, but if it doesn't work out we have other things to do. My world doesn't revolve around these things…

"I thought your review was interesting, but I couldn't read all of it 'cos it was so blurry…"

Uh… blurry?

"Blurry. When they sent it through? But – obviously, there was controversy that it was MOR – is that middle of the road?"

Mmm. Some puppies convinced themselves it was radio-safe…

"Well it hasn't got very much radio play, so I don't know. I always think it's funny – they said we'd sold out when we did *Radio Ethiopia* and it was the biggest flop, our most gorgeous flop. I loved that album and it was a huge, worldwide, flop. I think it was big in Spain."

God bless the Spanish. Do you look back on those old records with nostalgia? Do you like them? Did you like yourself when you were younger?

"Sure, some of it, some of it. I appreciate it, y'know? I don't sit and listen to them. The best of feelings were put into them, so I stand behind them, I'm proud of them. Doesn't mean I listen to 'em. I like 'Ghost Dance'.

"Right, we're just about ready here," says a cameraman, and in New York City on a Friday afternoon Patti Smith and I go on telly. Sure, it's a little absurd. G-L-O-R-I-A!

"Don't you see when you're looking at me that I'll never end, transcend transcend…"
– "Radio Ethiopia", 1976

WE ARRIVE IN New York knowing we have a chance of getting the first Patti Smith interview this decade. She is maybe doing the *LA Times*. She has turned down *Rolling Stone* and *Time* and *Life* magazines. And everybody else. She doesn't really "crave attention".

"I got an awful lot of it at one period and I don't really want more and more," she says. Patti Smith is 42, wife of Fred "Sonic" Smith (formerly MC5), and mother of two, Jackson and Jesse. They live in Detroit.

Patti Smith was a revolutionary androgynous poet who became the most authentic rock shaman of the '70s. She dared where others baulked. Her first album, *Horses*, has yet to be equalled for verve, insight, melancholy and rash exuberance. It's better than the Velvets' first album. It's better than anything. "Land" is surely the most exciting track ever to happen, "Gloria" and "Free Money" the most romantically elevating, "Break It Up" the most tortured.

When you get right down to it, there is *Let's Get It On* by Marvin Gaye and there is *Horses* by Patti Smith and that's all she wrote, that's the state of the art, to this day. Without Patti Smith, "women in rock" would still mean go-go dancers and there would be a massive chasm in iconography between aggressive and demure. Punk would've been inarticulate. Guitars would still be for learning chords on. Singing would be hitting the "correct" notes. Jericho would have walls.

A Mona Lisa, a Joan Of Arc, she was the most hallucinatory and inspirational live performer ("We know how to give our whole life everyday" – Rimbaud), and subsequent albums *Radio Ethiopia*, *Easter* (before which she broke her neck falling off stage and hence wrote the *Babel* book) and *Wave* grow stronger and wider, more intensely and properly left-field, with each passing year. After *Wave* she vanished, with Frederick, dancing barefoot. Nine years on, she has re-emerged with *Dream Of Life*, a beautiful record which substitutes the old irrepressible spitfire wrath with a transcendent serenity.

Serenity?

"Oh, I don't know what the word is…"

Dream Of Life is a new river on the map, a lake, a latent whirlpool. We are very fortunate. The profane has become the sacred. *Dream Of Life* makes you reassess your whole life – which has never been the same since that first sullen "*Jesus died for somebody's sins, but not mine*" – fondly. It is dignity incarnate. She is still that significant, a spiritual giant among (or outside) minnows.

I first met Patti Smith in the hotel elevator. This is a shock. This is not a surprise, this is a shock. My first words to a very thin Patti Smith are not what I would have predicted. They are: "Going down?" I can't keep it up, though. I introduce myself and she very affably explains that she will not have a lot of time at The Hit Factory this afternoon because she has to get back to her kids. This is fair enough, I agree. I am saving my powers of persuasion for when it counts, I tell myself.

We get out of the lift and Patti walks into a wall.

Are you alright?

"Sure. Sorry. Foolish."

Given that irony is this planet's only governing law, it's a moment I shan't forget in a hurry.

"Oh, I'm so young so goddamn young…" *–*
"Privilege (Set Me Free)", 1978

AT THE HIT Factory, where most of the new album was recorded, Patti has agreed to film an interview with Larry "The Duck" Dunn for Arista Records' general use. They will circulate this and she can then stay at home with the family. All being well, we will get a brief interview

before she leaves. This doesn't strike me as very guaranteed. Especially when we learn that Patti's old friend, the renowned photographer Robert Mapplethorpe, is dying of Aids in hospital and she has just come from visiting him, and is therefore understandably preoccupied. So, when it transpires that Patti will grant Channel 4's *Wired* 10 minutes, on condition that myself and not Leonora Whatsername is asking the questions, it seems sensible, if more than a mite nerve-wracking, for me to clutch the hawk in the hand. Develop a rapport, I tell myself, use your charm. Be real. Quote some Rilke. See what happens. You can always go back down the mines.

Giving Patti Smith copies of *Under Milk Wood*, *The Wasteland* and a Paul West novel was probably a good move, because what follows is drawn from five minutes' warming up, about 12 minutes' filming for *Wired* (I don't know about Patti, but this formalises my habitually shambling interview technique considerably), and a further 20 minutes while I basically keep her talking around a photo session where she's itching to politely withdraw. This last bit, where we start improvising and get onto childbirth and religion and plays she wrote in 1971, stuff like that, is pretty good actually. The telly bit is just where I get to afford a new record player and Patti gets to show the British public her act is, how you say, well and truly together.

In truth, Patti Smith, a rare legend, is one of the few people on this Earth I could never converse with enough. She radiates a unique beauty, a beauty of mind and will. It's in the eyes. And she once wrote: "Everything is shit. The word art must be redefined."

She also once wrote: "The horns. The relentless sounding. I want to put on *Wild Is The Wind*. Looking at you. I want to cut off all my hair and take a drug and another drug. Love. Monocaine. Peel away my layers, skin after skin, of translucent film."

Cameraman: "So this is Patti's mic, right? Patti-Cakes, did they ever call you that at school?"

Patti: "No."

Cameraman: "Can I call you that?"

Patti: "No."

Me: "Where does this thing go?"

Patti: "I think they called me Fatty Patti."

Cameraman: "That's hard to believe."

Patti: "Well, it's 'cos I was the opposite, y'know…"

Me: "Irony."

Patti: "Yeah. Six-year-old irony."

Me: "It's a force to be reckoned with."

Eye contact. It's us against the professionals. This is good.

> "If I'm changing the baby, I still have my thoughts"

TV, PATTI, IT'S a curious thing…

"I never used to watch it. I do now. Not continually… Obviously, it's like the chicken and the egg, it's changing the world, it keeps being changed because of the world. Sometimes it all looks like one giant music video. I like to watch the news, and I like when they show old ritual martial arts movies, y'know? The guys with the long white hair that fly in the air? Kung fu, yeah, that. Old-time, though. Not the Mafia stuff. And Sherlock Holmes movies, I love. Any. So, it has its entertainment value. I know there's a million terrible things about it…"

What do your children watch?

"Cartoons, and… those giant cars, those big monster trucks… no? Aw, that's a real American thing. He's a real American little boy."

We're "rolling", we're told. So. Let's get structured. What have you been doing for the nine years since your last record?

"Nine years in 90 seconds?"

Sure, 10 seconds a year.

"Well, quite quickly, it's been a very fruitful nine years. Fred and I of course were wed, we had many interesting travels and adventures, went to French Guyana, had our son Jackson. We both pursued our personal studies. We wrote songs together – he always pursues music. And I've written quite a bit, four or five books, about French Guyana and about the sea and all kinds of things. It's been nine good years, filled with a lot of building and reflecting."

Leading to *Dream Of Life*?

"I suppose one could say that. It's led to a lot of things."

Is *Dream Of Life* as gratifying for you as previous records? More so? Less so?

"It's a different type of satisfaction. Hopefully if a person puts a piece of work out into a planet such as ours which is bombarded with nine million tons of works, they're at least proud of it. The difference with this album is the joy of doing a whole piece with my husband and having all our thoughts mingled into one. That's especially wonderful for me. I'm happy."

(She's happy.) How can you combine being a housewife/mother with being an artist?

"I believe that an artist is an artist, it's in the blood, and you don't stop being one, you just are. And the same with a mother. I don't have to combine them; I just am.

"It's my pursuit. It never goes away. If I'm changing the baby or tending to one of the children's needs, I still have my thoughts, y'know?

"Everything is still revolving and sorting and collating and building. Of course, you have to balance your time, because suddenly you can't stay up all night and sleep all day. You can't stay up waiting for the muse to come slipping in through the window. You have to say to the muse, 'I'll see you between three and five during feeding times.' So, the self-indulgent aspect of creativity must be sacrificed. But – no great sacrifice."

There's no loss of intensity?

"Oh, not for me. I can only speak for myself. If anything is lost in intensity in a superficial way, it's certainly gained in clarity. I don't mind losing a bit of the adolescent energy in exchange for clarity. It's a fair exchange. Both are good."

Is music a satisfactory medium for you?

"If you communicate what you're trying to communicate. The only unsatisfactory thing is bad work. If you do good work it could be a book, a drawing, it could be something no one will ever see – a daydream, a private revelation…"

Does it matter if no one ever sees it?

"It is important, but it's not everything. I think every artist hungers to see the fruition of his work, likes to see it out in the front, you can't really help that."

Working and living with Fred, it must be 24 hours a day… Is that a fuel or a folly?

"We're human beings. We have tough times and wondrous times. We struggle, we struggle together, breeze, we breeze together. It's, er, a work in itself. There is no end to the levels and fields you can enter if you're willing to go through enough things with a strong heart. We have a good life, great kids…"

So what does a typical day entail?

"Oh, you wouldn't wanna know! Really. We don't have typical days. A million things, y'know? A million things. Jackson might hurt his knee, and at the same time a musical phrase comes through, and there's terrorism on the television and the baby's crying… a lot of parallel energies, mundane and wonderful. It has everything from laurels to laundry nowadays. It's all there."

What are your hopes for your children?

"For them to have good health and to be able to swim in the sea, and eat fruit without fear, to walk across a border and wave to a person from Iraq and a person from Iran. I hope they can sit with a Palestinian child and a child from Israel and they can all be friends and won't be fighting each other…"

You're optimistic about this?

"Certainly, I'm not going to be pessimistic for my children." »

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AROUND NOW A man starts signalling to me by cutting his throat with his fingers. I presume he means, "Stop." Everyone says, "Wonderful", as they would. I'd breathe a sigh of relief but I want to ask Patti Smith some real questions. She doesn't want to be photographed by the piano: "I'm not ready for the chanteuse mode quite yet." We persevere while Catlin snaps away and I throw all breeds of things out thinking that this is *The* Patti Smith, so it's got to stick. It's not the old Patti Smith, though. It's not the young Patti Smith. It's *this* Patti Smith. The one who flew away.

"Down with the dancers having one last fling/ Here's to the moment when you said hello/ Come on, my spirit, are you ready let's go/ Hi hi hey hey, maybe we will be back someday…" *– "Frederick", 1979*

AND MRS Smith recently attended a Beethoven evening by the Detroit Symphony Orchestra. When Patti was a child she dreamed of being an opera singer – "This was before the fireman and the nurse." Before Edie Sedgwick and Anita Pallenberg too, one assumes. "My mother bought me a box of Puccini when I had scarlet fever." She loves Maria Callas and Art Pepper. The only pop records she can bring to mind are "Man In The Mirror", "Into The Groove" and "Time After Time". These she likes.

In the William Burroughs 1979 interview just recently published, she said she never used her position in a positive way.

"I don't necessarily agree with that. If I said that I'm sure I was being a little hard on myself – I know a lot more now than I knew then. As you grow, your perspective widens, you see all kinds of things you could do better; I have no regrets.

"By reading The New Testament instead of *Seven Pillars Of Wisdom* I may've had a more benevolent attitude, but look at what we can all do. We can all be citizen soldiers…"

Citizen soldiers?

"Fred and I have a well-defined tapestry of personal ideology. When I became with child, that certainly brought another source of inspiration into it, but what we discuss is suffering, the environment, Afghanistan, Romania – everywhere you look there's heartache. That's why we wrote such an optimistic song as 'People Have The Power'. It's wondrous that we're filled with flame. We can't give up, we can't hide in a shell and start watching the news as if it's a soap opera. Many other songs have been written like that and many others will.

"The Old Testament is filled with calls to save a city or unify, to remember just how much is within our grasp. In the chain of eternity, it's just another little link reminding people what is possible. If you have any social conscience at all, it escalates when you have children. If having children doesn't change your life you must be a saint beforehand. When you see any child you project your own onto it. You have more empathy. It makes a lot of self-indulgent things seem ridiculous. I'd leave right now if there was the slightest problem with my children…"

I can tell. But don't they say "all power corrupts"? Can't it be dangerous?

"People have the power to obliterate political borders, to clean up the environment. Upon the meek the graces shower."

Of the other new songs, "Where Duty Calls" is "a pro-humanitarian mourning song – you can almost see the women in black weeping for their sons"; "The Jackson Song" is a lullaby ("I hear it and remember my sister eating roses in my mother's garden when she was three – Jackson doesn't really care for that song, he prefers 'Splish Splash I Was Taking A Bath'"); and "Up There Down There" was recorded the night Warhol died.

"I called Robert Mapplethorpe about some photos and he said Andy died, so – it was something to think about. To me Andy was New York, he was a spectre over the city like the Empire State Building, such a part of it. He's not my favourite artist or anything like that, but it was so sad to see him go. When I think of Andy I think of his hair, really."

Dream Of Life itself "is of course abstract as well as personal. I think of my dad talking to me, and of course Jesus also said, 'I'm with you always'…"

How important is religion to you?

"I don't align as a member of any organised religion. I think the spiritual aspect of the human condition is very important, and I've always been fascinated with the religious artefacts and rituals that men have developed. The things that I think about I wouldn't call religion. It's areas of study… I think there's an area of possibility of being and man calls it 'religion'. Man gives it the rules and abuses it or whatever. Man needs his gods. And should pay homage to them."

"The cross is the true shape of the tortured woman" *– "Babelfield", 1978*

RELIGIOUS IMAGERY IS always so colourful and bejewelled and memorable…

"Oh, certainly. And even a peasant clearing a field is… it's all beautiful really. It's only not beautiful when it's abused or exploited, as with the TV missionaries… Don't know if you have that in England yet…"

It's coming.

On the sleeve of *Wave*, among the doves, you quoted Rilke: "For one human being to love another: that is perhaps the most difficult of all our tasks; the ultimate, the last test and proof, the work for which all other work is but preparation…" That would now appear to have been prophetic. You followed it.

"Uh-huh. I didn't know then what was gonna happen, but it does indicate that I had committed my heart within myself earlier on, so…it was a very good thing to do. I'm a better person for it. I know, I know. Anyway."

In the iconoclastic play you wrote with Sam Shepard, *Cowboy Mouth*, you were Cavale, who craved escape…

"Well, that was like 21 years ago, y'know? In those days, I hadn't even performed with Lenny [Kaye], so, it's, 1970, I can't really…"

Does Cavale (who says, "The rock'n'roll star in his highest state of grace will be the new saviour") seem alien to you now?

"Think of yourself 20 years ago. Is that person an alien? It's you, but it's moving continually. I don't know, Cavale, we wrote that in one night, so it was just one night's thoughts, nothing more…"

One night of Sam Shepard and Patti Smith's thoughts is worth a dozen Dennis Potters. Read it sometime, weeping optional. Patti Smith has long taut arms and infinite presence. Would being on a stage seem weird for her now?

"I still have all the abilities, I just really don't crave the attention…"

Do you still bear a passion for Rimbaud and Baudelaire?

"I exhausted that period, but still every once in a while I'll return to Rimbaud, and *The Illuminations* are just as beautiful. I don't spend hours and hours on it, like I used to. I've been reading other things. But I'll always have an affection."

I wrote down a Rimbaud line here for you (he did too, readers!). Goes like this: "Only with burning patience shall we conquer the city that will give light, justice, and dignity to all men…"

"Nice, nice."

You go along with that?

"Mmm-hmmm. Mmm-hmm. Very nice."

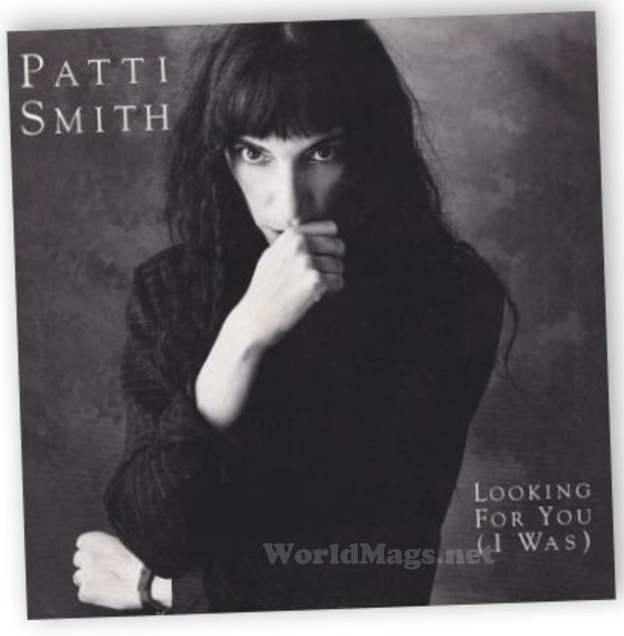
So – patience as opposed to radical shouting now?

"Well, they're both needed. Hopefully you wouldn't spend your whole life with either one, you'd find the time for 'radical shouting' and the time where patience was the virtue.

"I wouldn't say I was more conservative, no, not at all, I can only say I have many of the same thoughts, more concentrated, focused. I'm a wife and a mother and an artist but I have chosen, as George Washington said, to resume the citizen. I have become the citizen. It's a good place to be. I can't be Paul Revere; I have children at home. But I can have the same cares. Whatever I do I can do my part, however small. I can still be the person who gives the one that's shouting the water they need.

"And I have so much at stake. I've always cared about this planet – no one does art because they don't care. No one has children because they don't care. There's millions of people out there who care, if we could only work out communication. My goal right

> "I have so much at stake. I've always cared about this planet"



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"I don't mind losing a bit of the adolescent energy in exchange for clarity": Smith in 1988

now, though, is to go back to the hotel and see my husband and kids. Give us space and we'll crate wider space."

Patti Smith was born with bronchitis in the biggest blizzard in the history of Chicago. "Now I'm as healthy as one could be. I wouldn't win any awards or anything, but you have to stay reasonably healthy with small children. Moms aren't allowed to get sick."

She grew up in New Jersey, and her comment on her youth ("*I'm gonna get on that train and go to New York City/And I'm gonna be somebody, gonna be a big star/I'm gonna be so big I will never return, never return to this piss factory…*") was, "I was gonna kill myself but I'd have missed the next Stones album."

Lenny Kaye never forgets the children's birthdays. Robert Mapplethorpe is dying. "Lake Michigan is a spectacular place – spiritual, wonderful and strong."

Is childbirth the greatest moment of your life?

"Well…"

Or the wedding day? (This is a gamble.)

"Yes. Wedding day. Childbirth. Truly great moments. If it's what you want."

Obviously one would never have expected Patti Smith, the rock'n'roll nigger, to be saying this, this contentedly. But she most assuredly is. Can any act of creativity surpass childbirth?

"I wouldn't necessarily equate them. I've had wondrously joyful moments creating work, but I can't say it measures up to bringing a child into the world. But it's not a fair comparison. I can't take away how Picasso felt when he finished *Guernica*. He never had a child, so perhaps… I mean from his body…"

Is Jackson good?

"He's great. He's really naughty."

Is it important to you that you're American?

"No, it's not. It's a really good country even with all its things, but it's not my basic source of identity. When I was young, I used to feel more French than American. I just loved their clothes, I loved their poets, their movies, what can I say, their country. Oh, I love a lot of places. But that was when I was 19 years old, I wanted to be French… These days I just feel like a mom."

Patti Smith cannot tell a lie. Then and now. She's earned her state of grace. The last thing I say to Patti Smith is, "Love to the kids, Patti", because this is the right thing to say. A few days later, she sends me a picture with a message. It's the first thing I've ever taken the trouble to get framed in my life. And it's mine. Up there, there is a sea of possibility. Dip in.

"I was dreaming, God knows, a purer view/As I surrender to my sleeping, I commit my dream to you" *– "Dream Of Life", 1988*

Chris Roberts •

MARC HAUSER PHOTOGRAPHY LTD / GETTY

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Lots of spectacle

MM SEP 17 As the Bad Tour rolls on, it's all-round family entertainment from the otherwise quite wacko Jacko.

MILTON KEYNES BOWL
LIVE!
SEPTEMBER 10

THE SUMMER'S GRAND parade of American megastars has finally come to an end with the last great gasps from Michael Jackson. And so, now, must end the lively Prince vs Michael debate which has kept us all arguing cheerfully in the pub for nights on end and has found me firmly rooting for Jacko every time.

While Prince has arrived at his status as a sex symbol by embracing sex, Jackson has done something infinitely more interesting: he has become a huge sex symbol by insisting on asexuality. In his legend, and in his live performance, there's nothing to get steamed up about. When he places a hand on that girl singer's hip during their duet, "I Just Can't Stop Loving You", it's the most daring gesture of the evening, but it's in the honourable traditions of acting and choreography, nowhere near the suggestive territory of the nudge and the wink. And still the girls were squealing fit to wet themselves...

Prince may be a fruitcake, but Jacko's image-building has seen to it that he's a better one, what with his animals, his oxygen chambers and his special relationship with the remains of the Elephant Man. At the weekend, we had the extra fascination of his face, and whether it would survive the concert in one piece, following the tabloids' revelations that the surgical reconstructions of his features are about to give way. You'll be disappointed to hear it, I know, but he looked just the same come the end of the night; not even his nose fell off.

Prince is a pop star, Michael is an entertainer. Prince is contemporary, Michael is timeless. I like that. Jacko gave us caviar in a basket, a Hollywood cabaret, a sparkling revue. I like that too.

It must be said that the quality of the material itself was reason enough to be at Milton Keynes on Saturday, but from the opening seconds, when the bottom half of a pair of legs on the video screen heralded the appearance of Jacko on stage with "Wanna Be Startin' Something", it seemed important not to blink for fear of missing something spectacular.

And, oh, there was lots of spectacle. Not just the sensational lights and the explosions, the sight of Michael skipping, spinning and tap-dancing round the stage, the costume changes and the werewolf headdress at the start of "Thriller", but the smaller moments too. My favourites.

The wonderful ham acting of Michael, "overcome with emotion", head in hands, for long, long seconds, before being able to sing out the last word of "She's Out Of My Life". The sudden twinkling of shooting stars above the stage when it plunged into darkness after "Another Part Of Me". The fan (a plant?) who made it on to the stage to be hugged, child-like, by Jacko. The singer's intriguing excursions in and out of a red-lit tent that appeared on the stage just before "Dirty Diana".

Jacko gave us caviar in a basket, a Hollywood cabaret, a sparkling revue

Typically concerned with classic performance, Jacko announced "the old songs, the old-fashioned way", signalling the formation of a dancing troupe while he gave forth with a brisk "I Want You Back", an uncharacteristically staccato "The Love You Save" and a quiet "I'll Be There". "You're beautiful," swooned Jacko in the middle of that one, and the middle-aged ladies in front of me believed him, and clinked their plastic cups of tea together.

It's a testament to Michael's massive charisma that the whole show fell to bits when he walked off stage, presumably for a swift crate of Pepsi, leaving his band to play their remarkably unnecessary solos. One more second of this and even Jacko might've had a bit of trouble reviving a restless audience and leading them as effortlessly as he did to the climactic dramas of "Beat It" and the onslaught of encores, beginning with "Billie Jean".

BAD? He's bad alright. And not bad at all. Whichever way you look at it.

Carol Clerk

REX / SHUTTERSTOCK

Skipping, spinning and tap-dancing: Jacko during the UK leg of the Pepsi-sponsored Bad Tour

WorldMags

1988
JULY – SEPTEMBER

"Nothing left to lose"

After a devastating series of blows – broken marriage, dropped by label, failure to meet Lou Reed – Guy Chadwick has made good with THE HOUSE OF LOVE. "Maybe the other guys in the band have been lucky, but not me," he says. "I've been at this for nine long years."

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Photo session that provided The House Of Love with an image for their debut album: (l–r) Chris Groothuizen, Pete Evans, Terry Bickers and Guy Chadwick

SUZIE GIBBONS / GETTY

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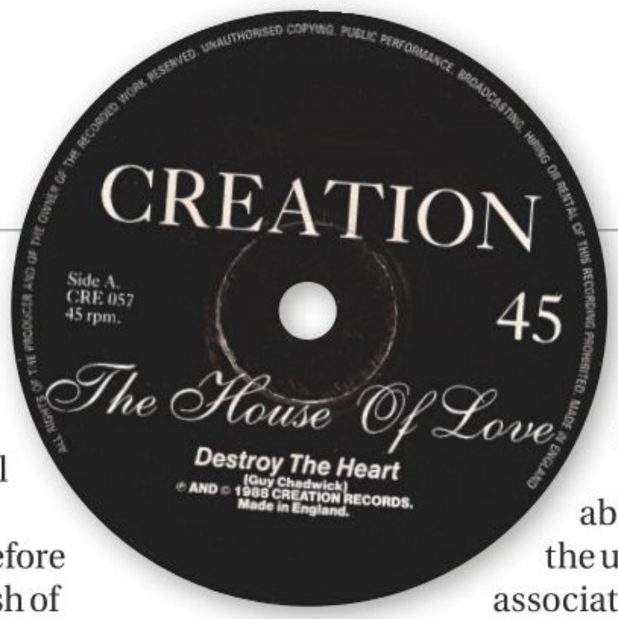


— NME JULY 30 —

SOMETHING IS HAPPENING, maybe something big. Something is happening (and you do know what it is). All the usual signs are here…

In a North London tavern, a good hour before The House Of Love are due to play, the crush of fans is leavened with journalists and talent scouts. Slung casually on the bar, an *NME* reveals that *The House Of Love*, the debut LP, continues, two months after release, to hog the upper reaches of the independent charts. That indefinable, oft-claimed "buzz" is in the air…

And all this in a pub some 200 yards from the actual venue! That's how far we've had to go to get a drink. That's how many people have shown for a gig that's supposed to be "secret"! In the other hostelry, Geoff Travis, prime mover behind Rough Trade and Chrysalis offshoot Blue Guitar, has cornered The House Of Love's frontman Guy Chadwick.

With an expression that betrays at least a smidgen of envy, Travis is telling Guy how lucky he, and the HOL, have been, how they can't possibly "blow it" from here, how lucky they are. Guy appears to keep his own counsel, but he'll return to Mr Travis' thesis later…

When they do eventually play, The House Of Love vary between diverting competence and sense-shaking brilliance. The latter isn't achieved effortlessly: when it occurs, the four band members relax the draining intensity that characterises their playing and catch each other's eyes – in surprise, in glee, in celebration. Tellingly, over 150 House-hunters have had to be locked outside.

That buzz is right. By Christmas, The House Of Love will be big. Maybe Wedding Present big, maybe bigger; perhaps, someday soon, stadium big. One thing's for sure: unless they choose otherwise, tonight's the last time they'll have to play in a pub…

More questions than answers

THE HOUSE OF Love sneak up on you. In the era of instant-impact, minimal-retention pop – caffeine pop, amphetamine pop – they ignore the vein and, given a chance, insinuate themselves into your brain, your heart, your lungs. The clinching line of the forthcoming single, "Destroy The Heart", is "*And I need her more than I need air*"; that's something like the feeling (part sickness, part swoon) that the HOL leave behind…

The House Of Love are an enigma. Even the band's name has so far made it onto only one of their sleeves, while Guy stares out from the LP's cover, gloweringly defying easy access. Their songs are bursting with images, but nothing is insisted upon, almost everything left to the imagination of the listener. All this makes them a dream for pop hacks, and thousands of words of twaddle will be written about them.

For now, therefore, it seems safer to detail the HOL's history and development through their records, each of which has been identifiably different from its predecessor, part of a continuum, sure, but also a separate entity, a moment captured…

A) "Shine On" (Creation, CRE 043): Last July, at the zenith of the hip hop summer, this debut arrived like an iceberg in the Sahara. Assured and absurdly ambitious, "Shine On" was a towering gothic cathedral of clanging guitars and echoed vocals that mocked others' puny motions of "epic". At their best, bands like The Cure, Echo And The Bunnymen, even U2, had illuminated the '80s with swathes of tensely dynamic Cinerama rock. With "Shine On", the HOL seemed to snatch that torch from the army of self-conscious copyists. For a first step, it was giant.

B) "Christine" (CRE 053): Released this spring, "Christine" was the siren that drew many to the HOL for the first time. Another huge, airless, production, its droning lushness (which attracted inaccurate comparisons with the Mary Chain) invoked an atmosphere of crystal-blue yearning and fragile joy. If "Shine On" had been a lightly brutal glory, "Christine" was a porcelain beauty.

C) *The House Of Love* (CRE 034): This debut LP's abiding reverberation is one of restraint. There's neither the uncurbed energy or flashy brilliance normally associated with first efforts, just a selection of songs whose lovingly tended array of textures are more suggestive of tapestry than rock. Imperfect, complex and disdainful of casual contact. *The House Of Love* feels not like a classic, but like the prelude to one.

D) "Destroy The Heart" (CRE 057): Due in the next couple of weeks, "Destroy The Heart" is a devastating single, 1,000 kilowatts of emotion and 100 musical ideas painstakingly folded into two-and-a-half minutes of utter loveliness. The way Guy intones and twists the opening "*Destroy the heart, she said*" reeks of genius. I've played the advance tape endlessly, finding something new each time and cursing its brevity. I envy you that first hearing…

Yes, I know. They also issued "Real Animal" (CRE 044), but I didn't much care for that, and with bands hovering on the brink of greatness you can afford to sing away to lesser gems, sure of finding diamonds.

Some Guys have all the luck

AT THE VERY heart of The House Of Love's emerging web of melancholy and release, passion and pain, is vocalist-lyricist-guitarist Guy Chadwick. Born in Germany – courtesy of a British army background – he is shy, serious and carefully spoken.

Unlike many who arrive at the gates of pop's pleasure gardens, he's seen life from somewhere other than a recording studio or a stage, even, ages ago, emptying the dustbins of the citizens of Rugby. And, crucially, The House Of Love is not Guy's first ride on rock's treacherous carousel. That ended in a series of almost unbelievably harrowing disasters, both professional and personal. In the mid-'80s, it transpires, he was the mainspring of a band called The Kingdom who, after a single on the Regard label, were signed by RCA and prepared for The Big Time. Guy, after much cajoling, takes up the story from there.

"I didn't like the other people in the group and they weren't contributing anything at all. So I sacked them and said to RCA, 'Take me or leave me.'

"They let me make demos for six months or so – 'Destroy The Heart' was one – but it turned out, the guy who'd backed me hated them. And when it was discovered that it had cost £10,000 for one song alone, RCA just sort of said fuck off. It was terrible – it left me with no way of working, no way of presenting myself, no confidence."

Yet that blow, sickening though it was, turned out to be just the start…

"As well as the recording contract, I had a separate publishing deal, and they dropped me too. And about three months after that, my wife left me, my marriage broke up…"

The head-spinning horror of those weeks is summed up for Guy in one incident, one missed opportunity.

Recounting it, he correctly declares it "a good story", but he isn't laughing.

"I'd always been a massive fan of The Velvet Underground and a lot of Lou Reed's solo stuff. I still am. Somehow my wife – who also managed me – got hold of Lou Reed's manager and said, 'There's this guy who's also on RCA who'd love to meet Lou.' She sent him a tape of my stuff and, as I expected, we heard nothing…

"Then Lou came over here on tour, and after the first of the two shows he did at the Academy, we got home and his manager phoned and said, 'Lou's heard your tape and he really loves it. Can you make it to tomorrow's show, he wants to meet you!'

"Oh my god! I was so excited. But the next day I was dropped by RCA. It completely knocked me for six, and I wasn't even able to drag myself to the gig. It was a very cruel irony…

"That whole time left me traumatised, completely devastated. For a year I didn't want to write anything. I got a job driving a van round London, and just worked until the feeling that I'd like to write – the first songs I wrote then were 'Shine On' and 'Christine' – and be in a band again returned."

The vehicle that transported Guy Chadwick from that private purgatory to his current idyll (settled, with a new girlfriend, a year-old baby and a burgeoning career) was The House Of Love, yet he's reluctant to identify that woeful past as his motivation.

"No, I never used it as 'fuel'. If I've used it at all, it's been to remember the pain, the intensity of feeling. So, when people see my situation now and ask me where all the angst comes from…

"The good thing was that after all that, I didn't feel cynical, and I didn't blame anyone but myself. I loathe self-pity, I just thought that I'd gone as low as I could and that there was nothing left to lose."

The wonder is that he wanted to get back on the merry-go-round that had all but crushed him, to risk a repeat performance. The reason, Guy himself reckons, is that far from just being a job or a hobby, writing is deep within him.

"It's instinctive. When I was 14 or 15, my uncle gave me a real cheap guitar, and before I could play it I was actually writing, around one string. Purely instinctive."

Are lyrics important?

"They're absolutely vital to me. I'll go back and work on a single word again and again. I just have to be proud of every single word. But I don't feel I have the right to insist that the listener treat them as important."

What other writers do you rate?

"I really like Leonard Cohen – he's written some really great lyrics. I'm not a great fan of Dylan, but I think he's unequalled as a lyric writer. Billy Brag is a brilliant lyricist… There's not that many really… Iggy Pop's lyrics are really funny! And I love Paul Simon. 'Bridge Over Troubled Water' is my favourite song of all time."

And groups?

"The first group I really liked and went to see was The Only Ones. I heard 'Another Girl, Another Planet' and just completely fell for it. I must have seen them about 20 times… Really serious adoration…"

Whatever happened to The Only Ones' lynchpin, Peter Perrett?

"From what I gather, he's just an incurable smack addict. He and his wife had a child who was a heroin addict at birth… Terrible."

Not everyone, it seems, gets a second chance.

Some Guys…

How many holy sisters does it take to change a lightbulb? Nun!

THE HOUSE OF Love's songs are stuffed with big, bold images that light up the dark personal corners with which they're largely concerned. And running through the whole HOL canon – as inspiration, subject matter and language source – are those handy perennials, sex and religion.

Guy's interest in the former is readily admitted (his band, after all, is named after one of the novels of erotic pornographic authoress Anaïs Nin, and a song like the LP's "Love In A Car" is an attempt at an unashamedly erotic rock song. To me, it's an attempt doomed to failure; unlike literature or cinema, rock had no tradition in this field and struggles with it. Guy disagrees.

"Oh, I think rock can be erotic. There's been some great erotic rock. Take 'Lay Lady Lay'. Bob Dylan is an incredible sexist, but that's a really sexy lyric, really moving…"

But coincidentally, rather than deliberately, erotic.

"That's another issue. I just don't like the English attitude to sex, the English mentality. There's something about it that's very unnatural, something suppressed in so many British people."

Which probably explains the geysers of great pop music that have gushed from these islands!

Although aware of no great personal conviction, Guy will, if pushed, acknowledge that many of his songs are drenched in religious imagery. This time his past seems very definitely responsible.

"Well, the first nursery I went to – this is very early on, I was maybe three and a half – was a convent. I don't know if that had a profound effect."

Were you flogged by rosary beads?

"Actually, I do remember how cruel they were, but that wasn't for long. From the age of seven to 14 I went to a boarding school which was prayer mad. Every time you ate, you prayed… We went to church three or so times a week and three times on Sunday…

"It was just this constant avalanche of Bible and prayer. I didn't understand it, or take much heed, but it's obviously stayed with me. It was happening, of course, at such an important time, all through puberty and that, and I had huge sexual hang-ups right into my marriage. My wife, to complicate matters, was a Jehovah's Witness!"

It doesn't pay to make too freely with the O-level psychology here. Most writers are attracted to religion because it's about issues like faith, desire, suffering and redemption, and is chock-full of icons.

"Right," concludes Guy, "there's no two ways about it – a man nailed to a cross is a pretty strong image."

The not quite ideal home

NOTHING, THANK CHRIST, is perfect, and The House Of Love do have deficiencies. Like, for instance, humour. Nothing they've done so far has raised even the suggestion of a smile. There are no jokes, folks.

"I'd like to think" retorts Guy, "that some of my lyrics are so wildly over the top as to be funny. They're not meant to be 'jokes', but there's an element of self-ridicule.

"What do I find funny? *Ever Decreasing Circles* with Richard Briers is genius, very funny and at the same time very painful. It's awfully uncomfortable to watch. I worry about getting older, becoming middle-aged and incredibly petty, which is what it deals with. I hate the idea that we all have to end up that way… though I'm not including myself in that."

> "I'll go back and work on a single word again and again"

Another slightly disturbing thing about the HOL – caused by their attention to detail and their (very, *very*) Englishness – is that they're perhaps the least "funky" band I've ever seen.

"We hate funk! All four of us!" Guy disclaims convincingly, and then proceeds to back down.

"Mind you, I'm not very clear what the word 'funk' actually means. Peter the drummer's favourite form of music is, I think, Stax. Is that 'funk'?"

Yep.

"And he loves James Brown."

Definitely funky.

"Actually, I love James Brown too. I'm just ignorant about 'funk'. I know we can't play it, though."

A final – mild – criticism. For a young band, The House Of Love seem strangely staid. They do nothing to shock.

"Well, live at least, it's such an effort of concentration, just getting the chords and the words right, that basically I haven't got time to get my willy out."

And the lucky winner is…

"PEOPLE HAVE ALWAYS liked us. We've always had brilliant reviews. Nobody has ever been able to write anything bad about us because… well, we don't rob anyone. I think we're brilliant…"

Guy Chadwick is speculating as to just why The House Of Love, touch wood, are happening. One reason he can't accept is that put to him by Geoff Travis earlier – "luck". Guy recalls that conversation with something approaching anger.

"He said, 'You're lucky.' I exploded! 'Lucky?' You're joking! In the last two years, we've played every toilet in England. Maybe the other guys in the band have been lucky, but not me. I've been at this for nine long years.

"People are writing brilliant things about songs that I wrote five years ago. If I have been lucky it's in the way that I've survived it all intact, without becoming cynical or hating everybody. But I've not been 'lucky' – I've worked damned hard…"

And that endeavour – allied to a ton of talent – may well be about to pay off. Something is happening, and it even has a name…

Welcome to The House Of Love! *Danny Kelly* •

Jane's Addiction: *Maker* reviewer bemoans lack of "arsequake" factor

ALBUMS REVIEW 1988

ALBUMS

Jane's Addiction
Nothing's Shocking WEA

Jane's Addiction are to Guns N' Roses what Aerosmith were to Zeppelin, what Van Halen were to Aerosmith and what Guns N' Roses were to Van Halen. Trouble is, as we slide further down Darwin's evolutionary scale, Los Angeles starts to become the Planet Of The Apes. Not that Jane's Addiction are that hairy – but their gait is undeniably bowed.

Jane's Addiction are the latest slightly-less-than thoroughbred to emerge from the city of out-of-work actors and models and the latest to have a contract waved in their faces by a Warner Brothers anticipating another Halen/Roses rave up at the bank.

However, like all the best calamities, JA also want to be seen as serious artists and have made the unpardonable mistake of trying to add substance to their swagger. Their quoted musical reference points are absurdly hip and well bluffed – Pixies, Throwing Muses and of course "a lotta classical stuff." In reality, it's a lot more predictable, with covers of the Stones' "Sympathy For The Devil" and Lou's "Rock'n'Roll" being thrashed out live, while on LP Jane's Addiction are more of a post-punk Heavy Metal Kids with art-school education, which, incidentally, they're more than keen to flaunt, along with their curious penchant for, of all things, the wah-wah pedal.

Given all this, and to look on the bright side, it follows that they're at their best on the three dumbest tracks on this LP. "Had A Dad" is a loose allegory about God, the universe and all that tosh caught up in one of the funkier moments from Zep's first LP. "Standing In The Shower" and "Idiots Rule" likewise are almost danceable, and if threatened with a sharp object or even a second listen, you might stretch to energetic.

But the aforementioned pretensions make for something dreadfully muso – all living colour in more ways than one, but no vividness, no panoramic vistas and no dazzle. In fact, Jane's Addiction's idea of a glam slam is more akin with a muted trump emanating from the generously cut folds of David Stubbs' favourite tweed trousers than anything approaching the infamous "arsequake" which we at Maker Towers so lust after.

Jane's Addiction sound like a band who've not yet decided whether to be completely clever or completely stupid – they don't completely fit either bill and as such are pretty unique for an LA rock band. Unfortunately, they conceal their uniqueness by using abstracts to distract. *Nothing's Shocking* is full of the kind of "idiosyncrasies" that are by now distressingly formulaic.

The clinking of glasses and chatter between tracks, the echoes of party swing-time bands are all rather more eclectic than eccentric. Even the slightly ghoulish voice of lawyer turned sex killer Ted Bundy on "Ted, Just Admit It..." is mere scant relief from Perry Farrell's petulant playground whine, which on "Jane Says" engenders epic levels of annoyance and homicidal urges. If Jane was addicted to this, hers must have been a pretty hollow existence.

Mat Smith, MM Sep 10

Loop The World In Your Eyes HEAD

"Eat me!" called the candy-coloured vinyl biscuits to Alice, and as she nibbled them her body grew larger and larger, like an escalating snowball in an avalanche. "Drink me!" screamed the bottle at Alice as she prepared to burst through the ceiling of her little house. Bending over and sipping from the miniature flask, Alice watched herself return to original size and shrink still further.

Equipped with both liquid and biscuits safely stowed away in her apron, Alice learned to control her body as well as her mind, allowing her through the looking glass and into a separate dimension. Her passage had never been blocked, but she'd never inquisitively desired to explore the unknown.

From behind, the reflection in her eyes portrayed the whole wide world: life in a monochrome plane where nothing glitters, not even gold, but anything and everybody can be controlled. Alice stared through the vinyl-backed pane of translucent glass and found a galaxy where her imagination was the only limit: her friend and her own worst enemy.

This is the existence Loop chose to live many aeons ago. *The World In Your Eyes* is a collection of rare grooves, EPs and B-sides recorded before the *Heaven's End* LP and this year's *Collision* EP. A budget piece of vinyl which allows you to have the cataracts removed from your senses for £4 by a Megastore assistant. A small price to pay for experiencing Loop's first experiments in exorcising the limits of perception from the four walls around you.

Cascade along the hard riffs and cleaver-dragged chants of "16 Dreams" and meet every other spine-jolting and jarring situation the album presents head-on. Not as a confrontation, but as a method of sharing their thoughts, their perceptions, being one with their consistent drone which prepares the razor-edged armchair out for your (un)comfortable listening.

Indulgent escapism, much of this compilation is sinking under the weight of its own feedback – half of the material you'll insist on taking to your grave, the rest isn't worth talking about.

But Loop can display brilliance and do. Swimming in the esoteric waters of eastern promise is "Spinning". Forget The Primitives' karma chameleon of "Shadow"; if you want to learn to walk on pop-water and to part the sea, learn to live this way. If only Alice could have played guitar, Wonderland would have never been out of reach. (8)

Helen Mead, NME Sep 3

The Wonderstuff The Eight Legged Groove Machine POLYDOR

World Cup Final day two years ago, Dudley Road, Wolverhampton. A young man asks your writer directions to Scruples nightclub, where his mates Pop Will Eat Itself are about to play before 20 people.

PAUL NATKIN / GETTY

He's in a band too, he tells me, and promises to send me a rough demo tape. Could this be the start of something big in the Black Country?

It's 1988 (time to get ugly) and the answer is yes. The Poppies are selling out 2,000-capacity venues in central London and young Miles Hunt's band have delivered two of the most delicious singles of the year. More importantly, The Wonder Stuff have also given us an album crammed with catchy melodies, hooks and harmonies, which we will return to again and again. Its sleeve is destined to become as well-thumbed as *More Of The Monkees*, *Never Mind The Bollocks*, *Parallel Lines* and *Dare*.

The Eight Legged Groove Machine is 14 songs long and possesses a confidence which betrays the Stuffies' tender years. It's also one of the wittiest records you're likely to hear; there's something both obvious and hilarious about a song called "No For The 13th Time" with a hookline that says, "*No no no no no no no no no no no no no no.*"

The singles "Give Give Give Me More More More" and "A Wish Away" are humble to the point of irritation, and at least two more inclusions are destined for 45rpm form. "Ruby Horse" is the sound of Slade getting serious, reminiscent of Noddy Holder the balladeer. "Merry Go Round" is the most aptly titled track – it goes around in circles, gets nowhere, but it's an awful lot of fun.

It doesn't all go well, though; the acoustic "Rue The Day" feels very out of place. It's full of wishy-washy sentiments and is as bad as Clifford T Ward at his very worst.

The Wonder Stuff are ambitious types, like young Thatcherites in dirty jeans, the grubbiest yuppies on the block. The aforementioned "Give Give Give Me More More More" has The Stuffies playing cut-throat Monopoly, and there's a similar fiscal fascination on "It's Yer Money I'm After Baby", where Miles leaves no doubt about his intentions: "*It's not your heart, it's your bank I wanna break/It's yer money I'm after, baby.*"

Nothing is much over three minutes, Miles Hunt and Malcolm Treece harmonise magnificently and the guitars are rift-laden but simple. Two years of solid live work had taught them how to play as a band. Both naive and knowing, cute and callous, The Wonder Stuff are one of the best pop groups in the world right now. And *The Eight Legged Groove Machine* is the most complete pop LP since *A Hard Day's Night*. Go get it, kiddies. (9) *Terry Staunton, NME Aug 6*

Crowded House: "big in Canada"

SINGLES REVIEW 1988

SINGLES

Crowded House
Sister Madly CAPITOL

In my early freelance days when I was just a dogface chancing it down at the Sir George Robey, I fell foul of the editorial authorities, and by way of a punishment was made to do a feature on Crowded House... I don't know what it was I did wrong – miss a deadline, perhaps, or misspell Dwight Yoakam – but I hope I don't do it again. I couldn't bring myself to say a good word about Crowded House, and though it meant begging for food that week, forsook the feature. Crowded House haven't changed – sturdy acoustic guitars and antipodean angst from people who've listened to too many bad John Lennon solo albums. Crowded House are big in Canada, which sums it up really. *MM Sep 10*

Brian Wilson
Love And Mercy SIRE

An old head case will never let you down. Recently, excited young pups have come galloping up to me to ask, "Uncle Danny, have you heard the new Brian Wilson LP?" "Yes," I've patiently told them, throughout the '60s and early '70s.' Old fruitcake Bri's comeback LP is OK, but the kissy-kissy reception has been overkill. It, like all The Beach Boys' stuff, drifts disconcertingly from the near-brilliant to Radio 2 fodder. "Love and Mercy" is from the pleasantly hummable end of the scale, but I wouldn't start chainsawing the roof off the family car just yet. *NME Aug 13*

James Brown
Static SCOTTI BROS

I knew that the JB saturation had reached maximum when I was at confession the other day and heard "Hot Pants" coming out of the reverend father's earphones! I swore then that I never wanted to hear another of those self-satisfied grunts in my life. Duty forces me, however, to inform you that "Static" is the best track from Mr Brown's most recent long-player, with those clever Full Force chappies twisting the knife by mixing scratchy old James Brown samples into his own record. But if you absolutely must contribute further to the coffers of this dust-crazed old wife-abuser, then Polydor's recently issued *James Brown's Funky People Pt II* compilation represent a far better use of your hard earned. *NME Aug 13*

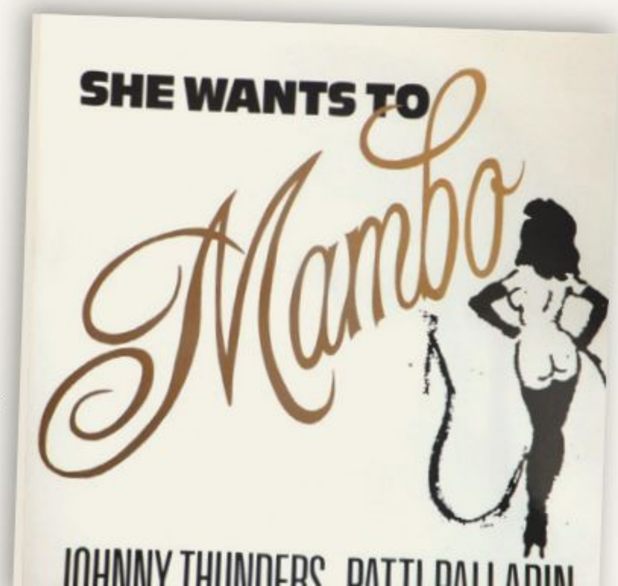
Status Quo Running All Over The World PHONOGRAM

The Quo thing is an abomination foisted on an already crap-clogged world in the name of Sport Aid '88. That connection effectively prevents Chas 'n' Dave (from whom the piano intro was filched) and John Fogerty (whose original is here bastardised for the second time) from suing, but a recent ITN poll among Africa's drought-ravaged millions showed that over 75 per cent of them would rather risk starvation than be rescued by a record this appalling! *NME Aug 13*

Johnny Thunders and Patti Palladin
She Wants To Mambo JUNGLE

More Proof of the lasting uselessness of anyone and everything ever connected with the New York Dolls (Saint M excepted, obviously). Messrs Thunders and Palladin continue a pair of careers that have consisted entirely of leeching off the body of rock that they profess to love but which their recorded efforts habitually desecrate. They disgust me. *NME Aug 13*

SUZIE GIBBONS / GETTY



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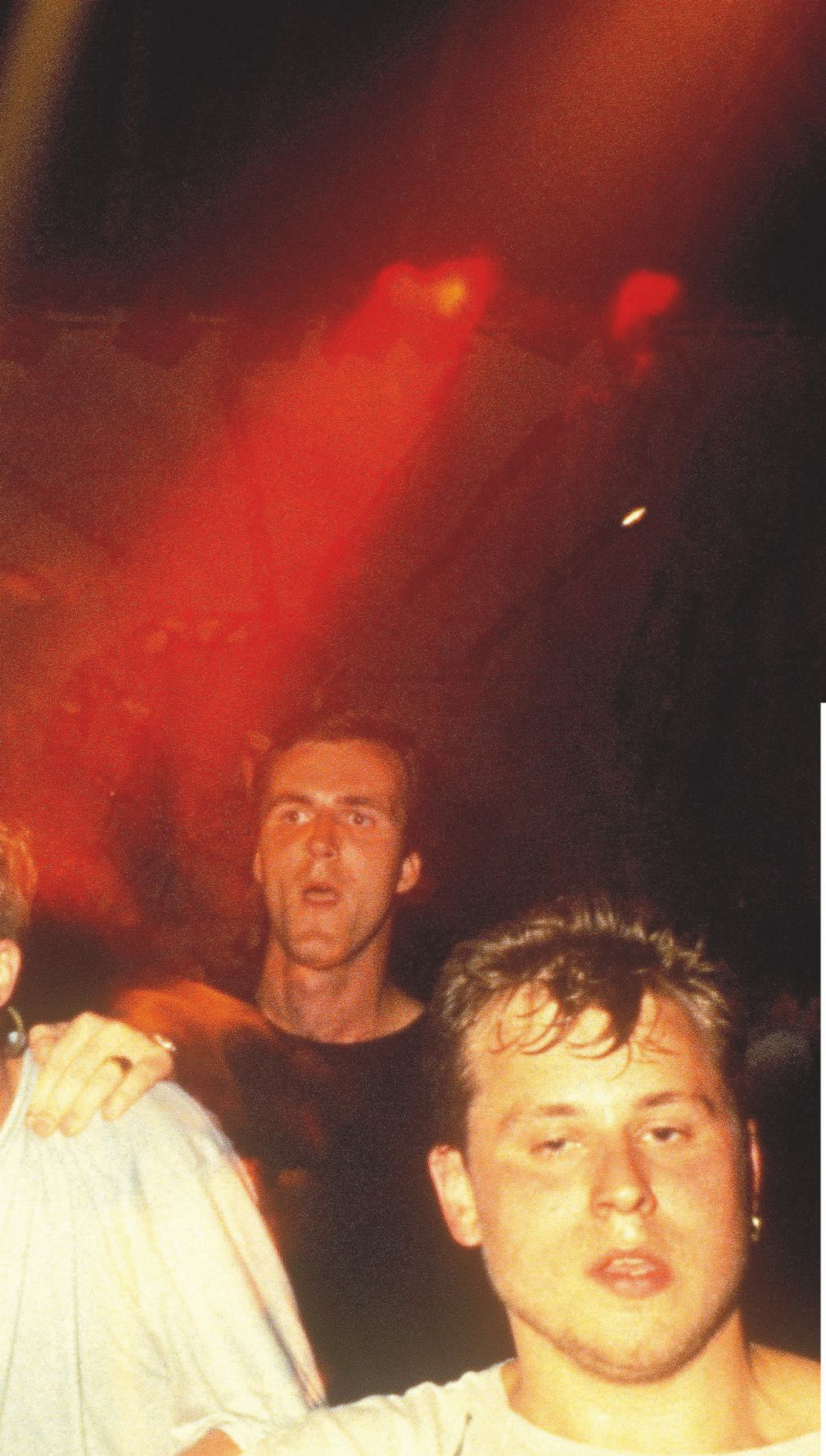
1988

OCTOBER – DECEMBER

THE SUGARCUBES, REM, SPACEMEN 3, PUBLIC ENEMY, U2 AND MORE



Clubbers at acid house party Spectrum, held in the Jubilee Gardens on London's South Bank, June 1988

REX FEATURES

"Little evidence of drugs being taken"

NME NOV 26 British police attempt to calm media furore about acid house.

NEW SCOTLAND YARD chiefs have poured cold water on tabloid newspaper campaigns to ban acid house. Top Metropolitan force officers held an unprecedented press briefing to put the problem of drug-taking at acid house and warehouse parties "into perspective".

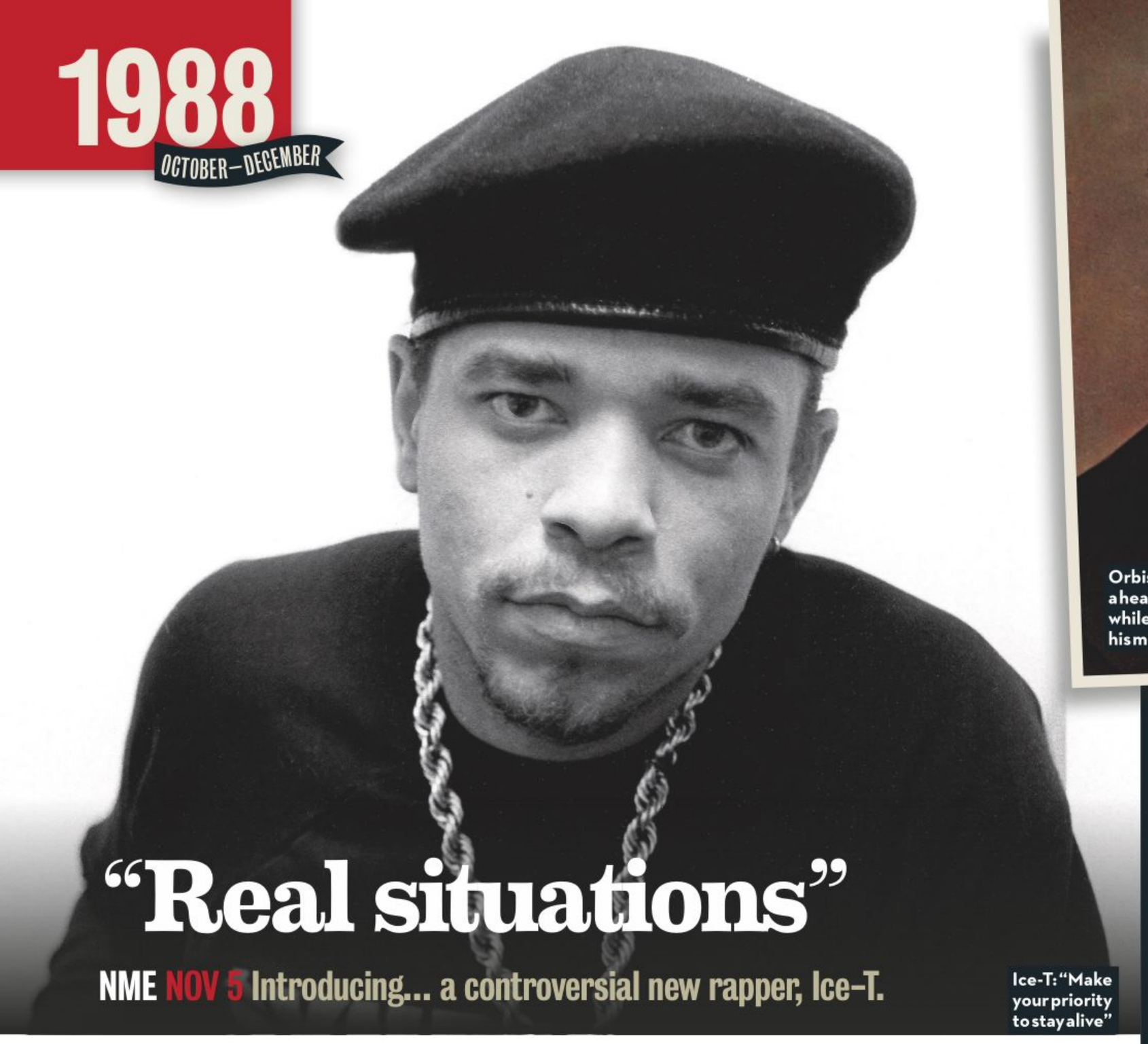
They told journalists that 51 cases of partygoers taking the drug ecstasy, apparently the favourite among acid house fans, had been reported this year – compared to 600 cases for cocaine, 600 cases for heroin and 600 for amphetamine taking.

A press officer told the *NME*: "We called the press briefing because of the heightened media interest in the problem. Acid house parties are a new phenomenon and there is little evidence of drugs being taken at them."

But he confirmed that undercover policemen have been infiltrating parties in order to swoop on drug peddlers. And the police Territorial Support Group (TSP), which took over from the disbanded Special Patrol Group (SPG), would be used to break up warehouse parties at unlicensed premises.

The spokesman said: "If we identified an unlicensed party it is quite possible that the TSG would go in. Our main concern is the safety of the building."

As reported in the *NME* last week, *The Sun* claimed drug pushers were selling ecstasy and cocaine at one 3,000-strong warehouse party in South-East London. However, the *NME*'s Simon Witter, who actually attended the party, denied the allegations.



"Real situations"

NME NOV 5 Introducing... a controversial new rapper, Ice-T.

Ice-T: "Make your priority to stay alive"

IN AMERICA, YOU have to be over 18 to buy Ice-T's records. The authorities believe they promote violence. *Power*, his new LP, plays up to the censors by including a sketch of a kid being shot to get hold of the new Ice-T tape. He quite likes the idea of the age restriction, because it makes kids more eager to get hold of the record.

All Ice-T's rhymes are written in the first person. Sketches that portray violence, murders, drugs and what that will logically lead to: jail. It's a lifestyle Ice was attracted to and narrowly missed. He also writes songs about making millions of dollars as a rap star, but hasn't done so yet. So how can he attract people away from one lifestyle into another, when the latter's a lie?

"The album should be considered food for thought," says Ice-T, not even touching the Perrier that's resting in front of him on the WEA board table. "You should agree with some of it and disagree with some of it. If somebody always agrees with the other, then they haven't got anything to say. A lot of the time I'm portraying somebody else, not me, someone I know. I just deal with real situations all the time."

When you first see the cover of Ice-T's new album, the images rather than the concepts hit you side on. There they are: the hooker, the pimp and the pusher, training guns on the record-buying public. Ice-T argues that the kids who'll be attracted to that imagery will already be involved in that lifestyle, and by listening to the record they'll realise the inherent dangers they'll come up against and be converted to a clean-living lifestyle, 'cos they know Ice made it.

He claims that's the way life is in LA: "When I bought the gun," says Ice of the gold gun his wife Darlene wears around her neck on the current album cover. "I saw it in a jewellery shop and liked it, who's fault is that? Then I put it round my neck and it's 'violence'. And I say, 'It's not violence, it's a peace symbol.'"

Why? "Because I'm just as dumb as they expect us to be. I mean, when Margaret Thatcher takes your taxes and says she's going to spend it on peace, what does she buy? Guns. Missiles. In America, they have a missile called the Peace Maker. One guy who's running for president of the United States, Bush, said, 'Strength is power is peace.' We know this don't make peace, but this is what they tell me!"

So how do you think the peace you call for among the LA gangs (subject of the movie *Colors*, for which Ice provided rhymes for the soundtrack) can be achieved?

"The way I attempt to gain peace is to get the kids to realise who they are, they're not each other's enemies. Try to mellow out. Don't hurt him, make your priority to stay alive, then nobody would kill anyone because they wouldn't want to go out on the streets and die."

"Ice-T says it and no other man will. I'm not scared to be myself"

Especially offensive is the way he portrays women, starting off with his wife nearly naked on the cover with a gun round her neck, not to mention the lyrics on tracks like "Girls Let's Get Buck Naked And Fuck"... "You can't read the book by the cover, you have to read the whole book. I'm no more sexist than a man who uses a pretty girl to sell toothpaste. I'm a realist, I deal with the real nature of me and men, unfortunately maybe to a lot of women men are sexist, not just me. Only thing is, Ice-T says it and no other man will. I'm not scared to be myself."

GETTY (2), REX FEATURES

Orbison: had a heart attack while visiting his mother.

"The finest white pop singer"

NME DEC 17 RIP, Roy Orbison.

"ROY ORBISON WAS the finest white pop singer on the planet," claimed Bono after hearing of The Big O's death following a heart attack last week.

Orbison was visiting his mother in Hendersonville, Tennessee, at the time of his death. Only days before, he was in London on a promotional trip. He underwent heart surgery 10 years ago but had enjoyed good health ever since.

Virgin Records have yet to decide what to do with Orbison's new material, recorded in collaboration with Elvis Costello, Bono, T-Bone Burnett, Tom Petty and Jeff Lynne. A single, "You Got It", was due to be released in January, with an album to follow.

False impression

NME NOV 19 Tom Waits sues over soundalike radio commercials.

TOM WAITS IS suing an American food firm for stealing his "vocal characteristics" in a radio commercial. The gravel-voiced troubadour has filed a $2 million suit in Los Angeles against Frito-Lay for a series of ads which he believed gives the false impression that he is endorsing the company's products.

Waits has also complained about a TV ad that "misappropriates his image and likeness", but decided against legal action because it was clear that the commercial did not feature the singer himself. It's the second major legal case involving an alleged "misappropriation of likeness" in America this year. In June the Fat Boys filed a $5m suit against Miller Lite brewers for impersonating the rap trio in a TV ad.

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Rapeman: (l–r) David Wm Sims, Steve Albini, Rey Washam

"A disgusting name"

NME OCT 8 Albini's new band, Rapeman, draws protest.

STUDENT UNION LEADERS at Leeds Poly have cancelled a show by Rapeman, the band fronted by former Big Black singer and songwriter Steve Albini, after angry women students objected that the name glorifies rape.

And women at Rapeman's record label, Blast First, are refusing to handle any of the band's product or promote their tour. The outfit, which is named after a Japanese porn comic in which the "hero" punishes "bad" men and women by raping them, were due to play Leeds on October 14, with Dinosaur Jr and Band Of Susans.

"We booked the group during the summer as Steve Albini's New Band," said union president Terry Blackwood. "Since then a lot of publicity for the gig has gone out with the name Rapeman, and in the light of the complaints received, we have decided that it would contravene the union's anti-sexist policy to allow the band to play."

Entertainments secretary Ian Child claimed that although he knew of the band's name back in August he believed it had since been changed. "I had some hesitancy in booking them at the time, and only OK-ed the gig because it seemed they wouldn't appear as Rapeman," he told *NME*. "We have no objection to either Dinosaur Jr or Band Of Susans, or even Rapeman if they agree to permanently change their name. Personally, though, I think it's a disgusting name for any band, especially when you find out where it comes from."

But promoter Steve Hawkins of ICE says that the band's name was always made clear to the Poly. "It was completely upfront that Rapeman was the name of the band when we signed the contract," he said. "The gig was even plugged in the *NME* as long ago as July, so there's no question of us covering up the name.

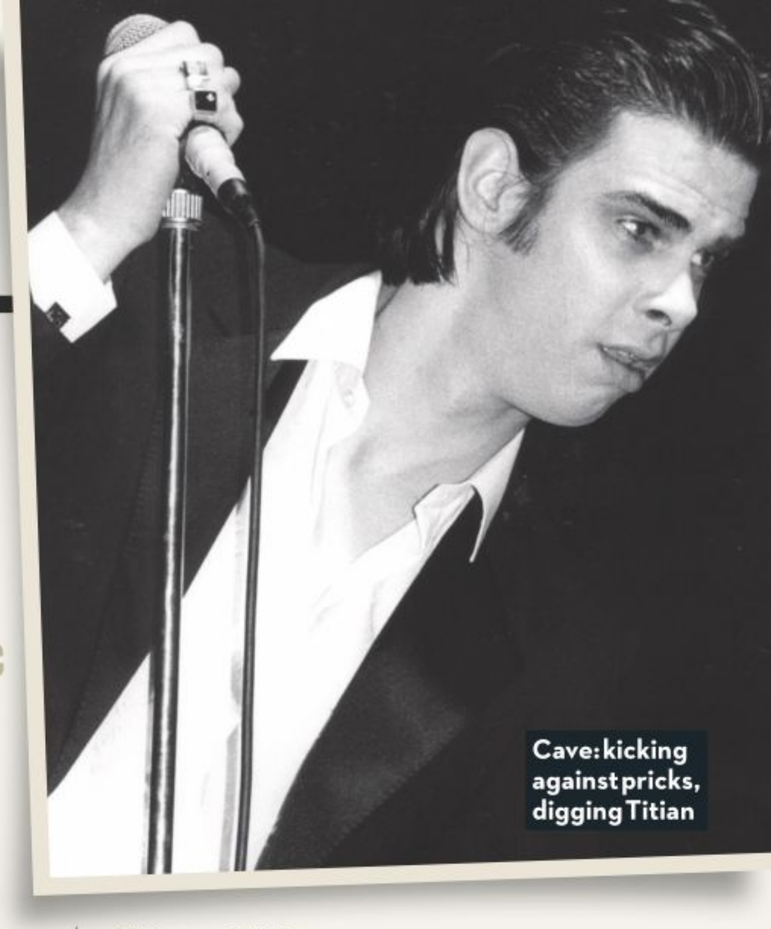
"Steve is trying to make people think about rape"

"What Steve Albini is trying to do with this band is to make people think about rape rather than sweeping it under the carpet or just having a kneejerk reaction to the subject. Neither he or I are in any way promoting rape, and it's absurd to suggest that we are."

As yet, none of the other venues on Rapeman's tour have cancelled.

THE MATERIAL WORLD OF NICK CAVE

NME DEC 3 The artistic life of Nick Cave.



Cave: kicking against pricks, digging Titian

Music

The Reels
The Saints
The Alabama Singers
The Pop Group's "We Are All Prostitutes"
The Carpenters
The Mamas And The Papas
Roy Orbison
Tom Jones
Elvis Presley
Paul Simon
Barry White's "Can't Get Enough Of Your Love"
Goblin
Burt Bacharach and Hal David
The Loved Ones
Filth
Dionne Warwick
Bee Gees' "Massachusetts"
Bobbie Gentry
The Righteous Brothers
PJ Proby
Kris Kristofferson
Tim Rose
John Lee Hooker
Bo Diddley
Leonard Cohen
The Pogues
Edwin Hawkins Singers
Golden Gate Quartet

Films

Scarface
Badlands
Blood Simple
Wise Blood
Ghost Of The Civil Dead
Blue Velvet
Maniac
Pixote
Wings Of Desire
Tattooed Tears
The Killing Of America
Forced Entry
Once Upon A Time In The West
The Deer Hunter
Night Of The Hunter
Cape Fear
The Getaway
Black Orpheus

Authors

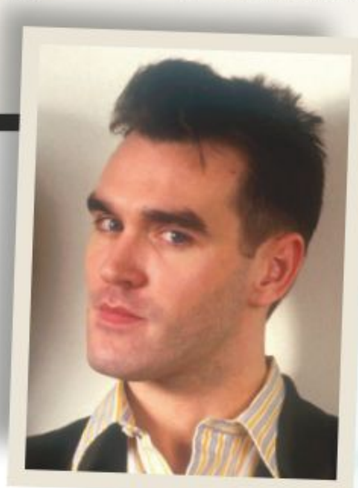
Vladimir Nabokov
Dostoyevsky
Harry Crews
Martin Amis
Michael Ondaatje
Flannery O'Connor
Jim Thompson
Nelson Algren
Ezra Pound
Hugh Sykes Davies
William Faulkner
Herman Melville
John The Divine
Jo Imog
Cervantes

Painters

Stephan Lochner, El Greco, Grünewald, Tintoretto, Puvis De Chavannes, Velázquez, Piero Della Francesca, Titian

Dionne Warwick

PHIL NICHOLLS, GETTY, REX FEATURES (2)



Hawtrey: "criminally undervalued"

"The last comic genius"

NME NOV 5 RIP, actor Charles Hawtrey. Morrissey issues a statement...

***CARRY ON* STAR** Charles Hawtrey died last Thursday, aged 72. Starting his career in the Will Hay comedies of the '30s, Hawtrey became the definitive cinema wimp but never reached the big-star status of many of his *Carry On* contemporaries.

Morrissey was a lifelong fan of the little man and once offered him £3,000 for the simple pleasure of interviewing him, but Hawtrey declined. Here he pays tribute to the man he calls "the very last comic genius":

"Charles Hawtrey's death ties in with the advance chill of 1992, the slaughter of the British passport, and the last death wheeze of the real England. Reports of his death were slight, uneven, and positioned fifth in line on both BBC and ITN national news, with no ex-colleagues stepping forward to salute the passing of the very last comic genius.

"The British film industry in the '80s is interestingly devoid of character actors. Supporting actors or comic actors such as Hawtrey are very much of their time and cannot ever be replaced. Criminally undervalued by the *Carry On* fraternity, Hawtrey was forced to share 15 per cent of each film's profit with the rest of the very large cast. As it went, Hawtrey was 60 per cent of Carry On appeal. By never giving press interviews, and by all accounts being unfriendly and friendless, Hawtrey's mystique surpasses Garbo. I personally love him."

WorldMags.net

"A college course in Black Life"

Post *Nation Of Millions...* ("the *What's Going On* of rap"), PUBLIC ENEMY's Chuck D takes time out to explain his band's rise from college radio to commercial phenomenon. "We just worked on the imagination of the black community."

— NME OCTOBER 8 —

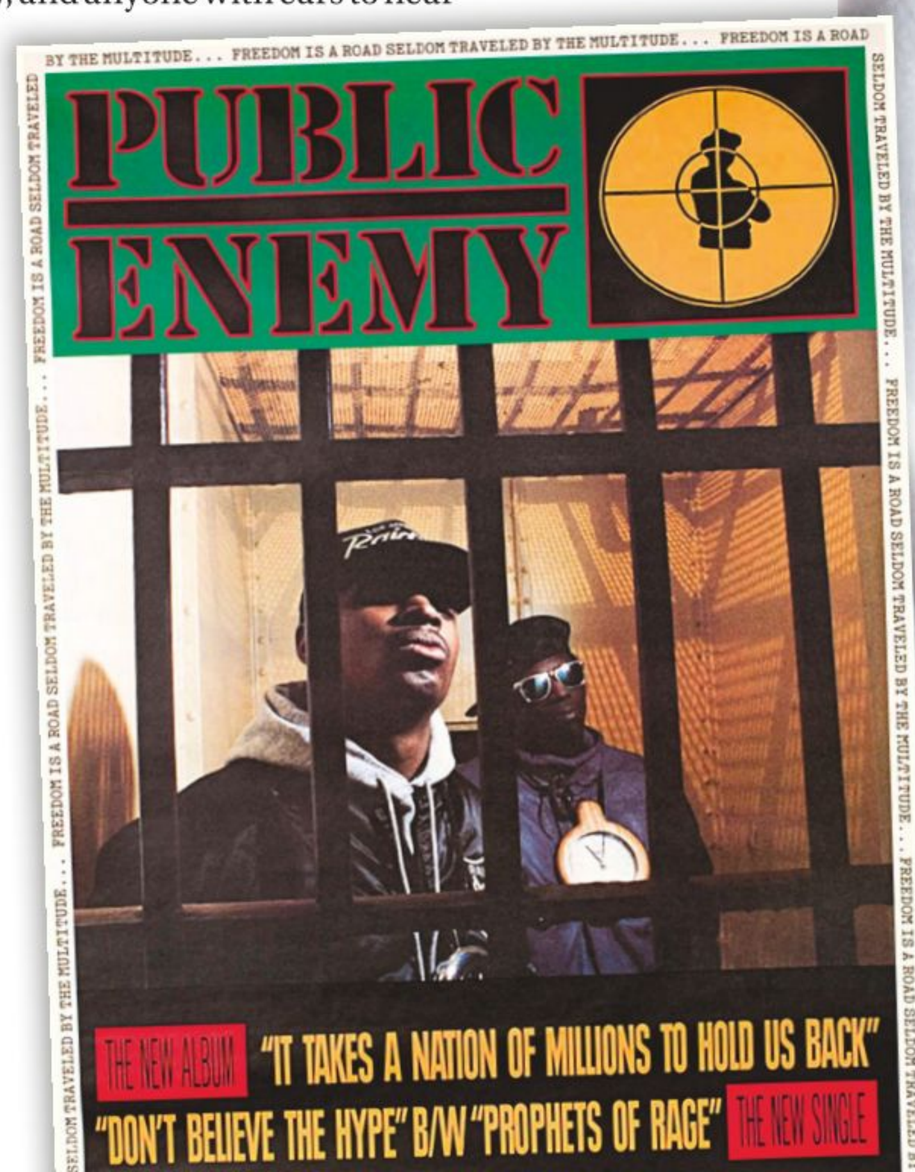
"Son of a gun... top gun... no joke... wanted in 50–almost 51 – states... MC protector, US defector, South African government wrecker... a timebomb... Public King... a pinpoint microphone killer... mind over matter, mouth in motion... non-stop rhythm rock poetry sayer... In Like Flint, Mercedes limousine with a hardcore tint... like Coltrane, insane... the hard rock trooper... an un-Tom... louder than a bomb... Public Enemy Number One... ONE... ONE... ONE."

PUBLIC ENEMY MAIN man Chuck D has a variety of colourful ways of describing himself. Sat in Def Jam's downtown office waiting for an audience, I'm nervous. For days now – in the bath, in the bed, on the plane over, and here, in my head – I've been practising those two little words of greeting – "Yo, Chuck!", "*Yo*, Chuck!", "Yo, *Chuck*!" – over and over.

But most of my palpitations have nothing to do with the broadcast persona of Chuck D, but rather with the realisation that has dawned on me over the last few months of just what an important hombre he is. He is, after all, at the centre of Public Enemy, and anyone with ears to hear has had them scorched by that strange, almost mystical, drone that emanated from their first LP. But it was their second, this summer's *It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back* that really ripped the lids from my droopy eyes. Public Enemy are the greatest damn rock'n'roll band in the world!

Now the man at the hub of their steel web of intriguing parts, Chuck D, walks through the door and towards me. One more mental rehearsal – it's only two words – and my mouth goes into action: "Hello, Chuck, pleased to meet you..."

He is wearing his Los Angeles Raiders cap and jacket; silver and black, like the sides of *Nation Of Millions*.... The Raiders are the bad boys of gridiron football, the violent outsiders that the vast majority love to hate: draw your own conclusions. »



MICHAEL OCHS ARCHIVES / GETTY

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Public Enemy in New York, 1988: (clockwise from bottom left) Flavor Flav, Professor Griff, Terminator X, S1W and Chuck D

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1988

OCTOBER–DECEMBER

Public Enemy appear on a bill including Run DMC and Derek B at the 1988 Montreux Rock Festival

The way Chuck tells it, Public Enemy's ascension has been anything but haphazard, accidental or lucky, rather the result of talent bolted to scientific planning and attention to detail. He then proceeds to demonstrate what he's talking about, whisking me off to CBS's giant money mill to check the sleeve proofs for "Night Of The Living Baseheads", their next 45, while all the time quizzing me about the recent rock riot in Greece. "We're being asked to play there, but that sounds like some heavy shit. It's enough the stuff we attract ourselves, without going into that kinda place blind."

When, two hours later, I finally get him sat down to talk, I tell him that it's this very propensity for being in the vicinity of trouble that has stopped a lot of people from coming to terms with just what a great band, just what brilliant artists, Public Enemy are. It's for that reason, I continue, that I want to redress the balance, to talk about the music rather than the mayhem, to talk about the history rather than the hysteria, to talk about Public Enemy rather than public enemies.

From across the table, you can almost touch Church D's sigh of relief…

"In the '60s, my parents were in their twenties, so the house was full of it. First jazz, then Motown and all that."

There's always been music in Chuck D's life, long before the first explosion of rap turned him into a crusading fanatic. Motown, Atlantic, Stax, all the giant figures from the pantheon of black pop get mentioned.

Were these people heroes?

"There were idols that I didn't realise were idols till later… The Temptations, The Four Tops, Marvin Gaye, Curtis Mayfield, y'know, most of the people that get followed today except now they call it rare groove.

"And Stevie Wonder. We've just done something with Stevie. He was performing right over here in Radio City and he asked us to come down and do 'Don't Believe The Hype'. I took my mom down there with us to see him…"

Public Enemy offer a fairly apocalyptic world view on most things. Are they part of the black pop tradition?

"Well yeah. Public Enemy is a reflection of the street, of how black people are living, just as all those groups and sounds were about how we were living back then. That's the problem with most R&B today; it doesn't reflect… the masses. Back then it did.

"Especially Motown. Me, I'm a top-notch Motown fan. I study Motown: for its relationship to the streets, for song arrangement, for the aforementioned ability to reach the listener's inner feelings…

"When I started to write, I tried to combine that Motown way of putting feeling into people with the way that some rap people, say Melle Mel or Run DMC, were able to get across an idea. I took all those things, everything, and tried to shove 'em all in one pot."

Public Enemy didn't appear out of nowhere. Chuck describes a long process, as the various important personnel gravitated toward one another in the Long Island rap scene (influential but little written about since it was the Manhattan/Queens groups that got to the recording studios, and therefore the interviews, first), and as their various talents and ideas coagulated.

For Chuck himself, the jump from rap fan to DJ came in the late '70s, a result of his dissatisfaction with the way rap itself was going.

"The DJs had got into this echo chamber thing. They weren't saying anything at all. I mean, people say rappers aren't saying anything now, but then… Anyway, I'd be riding in the back of a car with my homeboys, always complaining about the DJs, and my guys would say, 'Suppose you could do better,' and I'd say, 'Sure I could; I'd lose that echo and be putting something across for a start.' They're all going, 'Oh yeah, sure, right…' But I just said, 'One day I will…'"

When that "one day" came, at his local college, rapping over MFSB's "Love Is The Message", what Chuck D likes to describe as "fate" took a hand. In the audience was a young Hank Shocklee, then a popular DJ on Long Island with his Spectrum system, and on the lookout for new talent for his outfit. Shocklee approached Chuck to work with him, starting the friendship/ partnership that's at the very core of Public Enemy.

During the hip hop explosion of the late '70s and early '80s, Spectrum was the sound on Long Island, mounting and starring in the best-organised and best-attended gigs. The rap violence panic that struck in 1982, however, saw all rap acts being tarred with the same brush, and as the venue owners panicked and put up the shutters it became increasingly hard for even Spectrum to find outlets. Chuck D and Hank Shocklee needed another favour from fate. It came in the form of one Bill Stephney and the next piece of the jigsaw that was to become Public Enemy fell into place.

"Bill went to same school as us, Adelphi, and was the programme director of the college radio station WBAU, 90.3 FM! Back then nobody listened to it; everybody listened to the commercial stations. We knew there was a void in the black community. Rap records had been out and about for three years, but there was no place for our people to hear them.

"Once we got the go-ahead from Bill to do something, we did these professional-looking handouts in the non-professional area. I'm a graphics man, and with good graphics you can make your shit look like 'wow, maan'. People got the idea that there was someone big behind the station, and they found out that all the biggest local DJs were on the radio… 'What? Spectrum on the radio?!!'

"Bill had the willing openness to say, 'Hey, I'm in charge and we're going to play hip hop, so let's get busy', while Hank and me had the ability to find records and to put together something that would explode in our community, in our area."

And, within its limited broadcast area, explode it did, increasing the station's listening figures eightfold within weeks of its launch and going on to become the biggest, and most influential, radio show in the New York area. It was also the honey pot that attracted the remaining elements of Public Enemy.

"It was the fastest-growing thing I've ever experienced," Chuck recalls. "It got more and more popular, reaching out to the Queens area; it influenced the starting of Run DMC (it was the station they listened to), LL Cool J and all that whole Rush scene that popped up in 1984. We just worked on the imagination of the black community, an imagination that never got, erm, fertilised or… messed with."

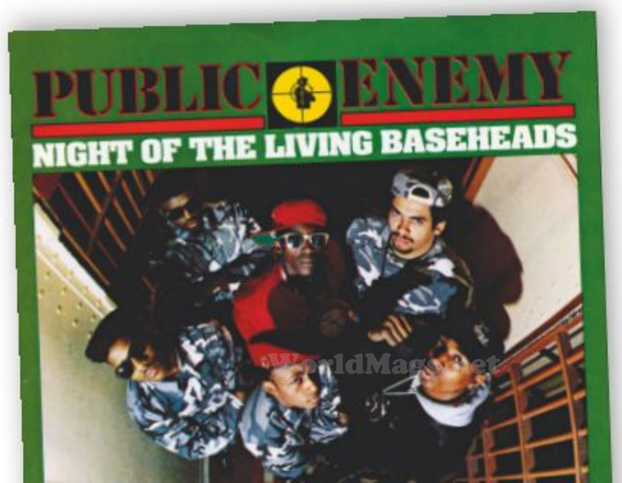
Soon the gang was all to hand.

"To cut a long story short, we all worked together there. Hank and me had the Super Special Mix Show, Flavor had his own show, Terminator X was doing remixes for Spectrum, Professor Griff had been a Spectrum DJ and we brought him along.

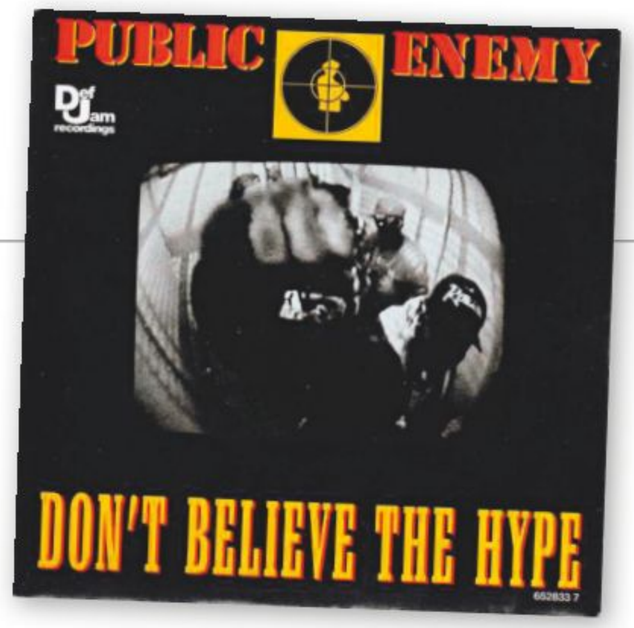
"It was so much fun, man, and the guys at the station just couldn't believe it, the things we were doing – this was some new shit…"

By 1986 the success of the WBAU shows, and their reputation for mashing together the best of new musics (a reputation enhanced and spread by their hot club, Entourage, and a UHF TV show called *Word – The World Of Rock And Dance*) meant that Chuck and co were coming under increasing pressure to make the leap into the recording business. As early as December '84, he and Hank Shocklee, short of records for their show, had broadcast the demo that eventually became "Public Enemy No 1", and that had started the stampede. Chuck D was the stumbling block.

"People who'd been influence by our radio shows were getting to me. Like Run DMC would say, 'Yo, Chuck, your stuff is incredible, you should make some records.' And like, y'know, Rick Rubin was



SUZIE GIBBONS / GETTY



ringing my crib every day and I'm saying to my mom, 'Tell him I'm not home, tell him I don't wanna make no stupid goddam records.'

"Y'see, as we'd been promoters, me and Hank knew that this music business was real greasy; too shaky for me, man."

After almost two years of prodding, Chuck and Hank were finally persuaded. Two things changed their minds.

"Firstly, there was a gang-related incident at a Run DMC gig in Long Beach, California. The group, and rap music in general, were being blamed for the violence and, to be honest, they didn't handle the media very well. I said to Hank and Bill Stephney (who was also trying to get me to do records), 'Oh man, they're really doggin' Run DMC. If I got in there they wouldn't be doing any of that shit to me, fuck that.' And Bill just turns to me and says, 'Why don't you then?'

"Secondly, at the Raising Hell concerts, I got to see how Rush operated and I thought they – Rick, Russell, Run DMC, LL – were all good people, a good blend. I told Hank that I thought this was a nice environment we could get involved with, definitely cool, none of that exploitation to the highest degree. A whole different situation. So, I said to Rick, 'OK, man, let's do some business.'

The only remaining problem was a name, and Hank Shocklee, remembering their first recording back in December '84, solved that. Public Enemy were ready for an unsuspecting world.

Countdown… Armageddon… Noise… Hype… Edge Of Panic… Mind Terrorist… Louder Than A Bomb… Channel Zero… Living Baseheads…Black Steel… Hour Of Chaos… Rebel Without A Pause… Prophets Of Rage…

The day I got hold of *It Takes A Nation Of Millions To Hold Us Back*, long before I'd managed to play it, I knew it was a great LP. This had nothing to do with sixth sense; it was just that the titles (even more so than those on their debut effort) were so bloody sharp, vivid, resonant, so certain to set your brain off in a dozen different directions, that it could hardly be otherwise.

So, Chuck, how do you write?

"I start with the titles…"

Bingo!

THE SUCCESS OF *It Takes A Nation…*, however, goes beyond the mere quality (massive though it is) of its music and lyrics. An hour long, linked by recurring themes and live inserts, and a distinct leap forward from their previous work, it is nothing less than a work of art.

"I'll let you in on a secret," he laughs, after I've harangued him for five minutes about the godlike genius of Marvin Gaye. "When I was putting *Nation Of Millions* together, I wanted it to be the *What's Going On* of rap. Not in its content, but in its sense of arrangement and going into places no rap LP had gone before.

"Now I'm not worried whether people like the individual songs – and I ain't going to start boasting about them – but I know that no rap album has been in the places I made this one go. I mean, the live inserts, the beats, the attitude. Forget about the words, I'm talking about the totality, the attitude.

"The LP is also different because it ain't as immediate as most rap. Sometimes you can't make people feel as good as they wanna straight away. There are things on this LP that people aren't going to like the first time they hear them, things that you have to keep going back to, things that'll take a bit of uncovering.

"Hank and me had to make it deep, so deep that people still be trying to pick up on it two years hence, so deep that it cannot be dismissed as disposable. It cannot easily be ignored or moved out of the way. That's very important for rap; that idea that the music was disposable got me hot, but then again it was true, until we did this album. We had to work against that whole network of prejudice – we had to make sure it stuck like glue."

In succeeding in those missions, Public Enemy – like Gaye, Mayfield, Sly, Davis and very few others before them – dismantled the traditional, ingrained way that black artists are signed, marketed and listened to.

Chuck is not inclined to make any bones about it. Most of Public Enemy's success – with the listeners, with the press – is down to a combination of careful hard work and suss that other groups are either too lazy or too stupid to employ.

"It's a science," he insists. "I mean, rock'n'roll is there to be studied and learned about. Rap has closer links to rock'n'roll than to any other music. What is rock'n'roll? It's the projection of attitude, not the deliverance of sound. Attitude! Rap's acts have that attitude, that character, that rock bands have used to get across to the public. They just haven't learned to project it."

Public Enemy's biggest problems have come from the less easy to control matter of how people respond to their image and stance, rather than their music. The gun-toting Security Of The First World spring to mind.

"I've explained this before, but in order to keep playing gigs we had to ensure that there was order at those gigs we played. People need to see the presence of a force of order, and that presence needed to be uniformed, just like the security at a big office building will be uniformed for easy identification. That was crucial in ensuring that people had the space and time in which to enjoy themselves.

"Now that we're playing places with their own security, Security Of The First World are a symbol, a symbol that Public Enemy are at war, and that black people should be at war to regain their enslaved minds. It's the war to regain awareness; that's what 'Countdown To Armageddon' is about."

But the whole S1W seems so calculated to provoke.

"Of course, you're going to be worried by the sight of black men in uniform. To that extent, it's deliberate, of course. It makes people feel the same way I, and other black people, feel when they see a policeman! Or how the Vietnamese felt when they saw all those uniformed Americans coming. I want everyone out there to realise that black people feel certain things too."

The other part of Public Enemy that its inventor has to keep constantly tampering with is the non-musical output of Flavor Flav and, more recently, Professor Griff, the way that pair behave, the things they say. Chuck isn't daft enough to pretend he doesn't know the value of controversy, but he's aware too that there has to be limits or the group'll be ostracised. It's a tough line to walk.

"Well, Flavor," he begins slowly, "will be Flavor.

"OK, look – Flavor's gonna make mistakes, but people aren't going to treat his mistakes in the same way they'd treat one of Griff's outbursts, where a real threat is perceived. Flavor's always gonna be Flavor, but there's no real sense of threat. Flavor is only a threat if *everyone* starts to think like him; then he's a threat to black people.

"I'm the mediator in all this. Flavor is what America would like to see in a black man – sad to say, but true – whereas Griff is very much what American would not like to see. And there's no acting here – sometimes I can't put Flavor and Griff in the same room.

"I'm in the middle. When Griff says something too much, I come to the rescue of white people; when Flavor does something, I come to the defence of the black public. I do constrain them, but not much, because Public Enemy are the only black group making noises outside of their records. But that controversy has to be harnessed.

"When Hank and me created this, we knew that just me rapping on top of his tracks, however good, just wasn't going to make it. Griff and Flavor are that extra something that make it work, that make it fun.

"It's the combination of all those things, and Terminator X and Security, that make Public Enemy."

Chuck D is either the most literate, together musician I've ever met, or a brilliant actor and bullshitter. Probably plenty of each. He must, I just know, have a game plan for the Greatest Rock'n'Roll Band In The World.

"Public Enemy's programme is the taking of music followers, and those who are willing to listen, to see black life as it's lived.

"It's a college course in Black Life," he laughs, "as a matter of fact, it's a whole damn degree you can earn!"

Maybe, I suggest helpfully, you could put the exam papers on the inner sleeves of forthcoming record releases.

"You're giving me ideas! Maybe we can give out those little degree certificates with the Public Enemy targets in the wax seal…"

"Yeaaah Boyee!" I say. Well, in my head anyway… *Danny Kelly* •

"Sometimes I can't put Flavor and Griff in the same room"

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1988

OCTOBER–DECEMBER

REM pose for the *NME* in the disused Morton Theatre, Athens, Georgia, in March 1988

WorldMags.net

“We’re not known as a fun band”

A game of two halves with the band of 1988: REM. As *Green* is readied for release, we meet a self-examining Michael Stipe and a frankly drunk Peter Buck. “I don’t want us to be known as this anxiety-ridden band,” shouts the hippy-hating theoretical streaker. No danger of that now…

“Sometimes I feel like I can’t even sing/I’m very scared for this world/I’m very scared for me…” *– “Everything”*

— MELODY MAKER OCTOBER 29 —

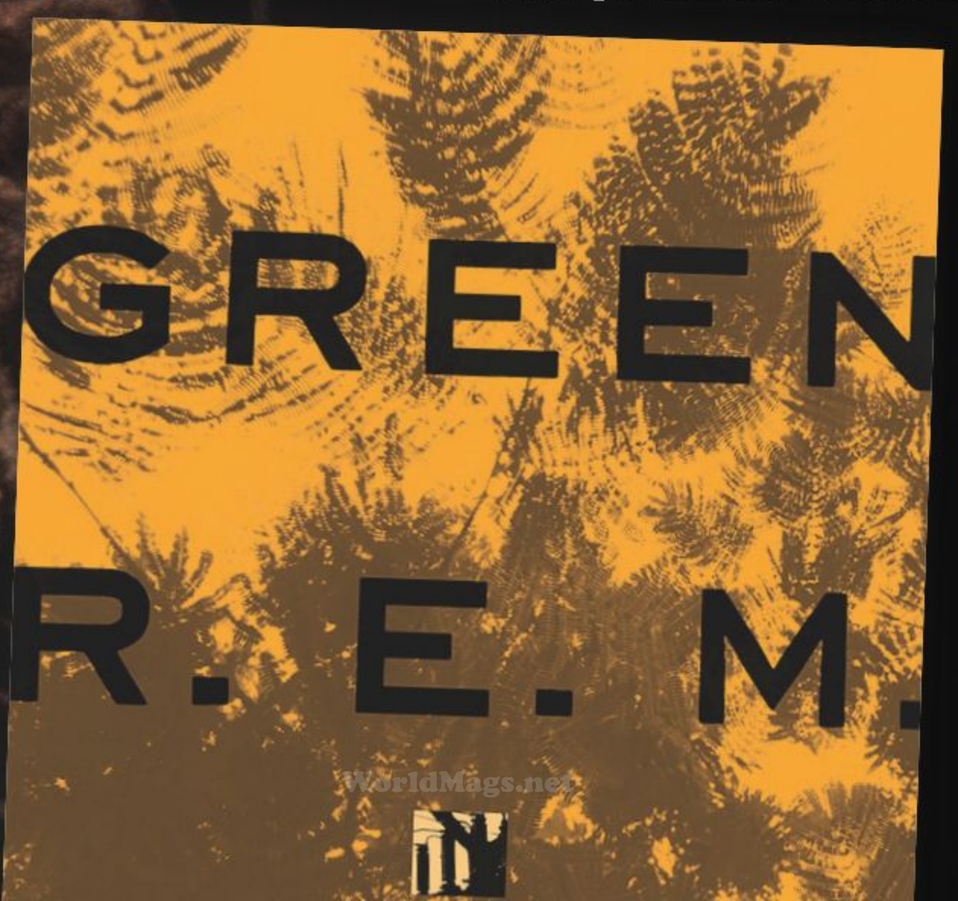
MICHAEL STIPE SITS sipping garlic soup in an art hangout called The Grit, a disused railway station on the edge of Athens, Georgia, his adopted hometown. He’s suffering from mild flu and serious zen. It’s the day after John Lennon’s birthday and a girl is drawing what she imagines “Imagine” would look like. Another is reading poetry to a friend and yet another is miming a movie.

Stipe loves all this, revels in the annual intake of fresh students, appears to glory in his role of father confessor and beatnik benefactor, despite his protestations to the contrary. He reaches into his satchel and produces a plastic pouch from which he proceeds to roll a cigarette, smiling benevolently as a large black fellow waltzes in the door, dressed head to foot as Lawrence Of Arabia.

I shake my head and tut as Stipe explains he’s been dressed like that for weeks – something to do with performance art. I opine that this is just the kind of imbecilic behaviour I’d expect from a nation that looks likely to elect George Bush to the White House and Stipe informs me that REM’s new album, *Green*, is due for release on election day.

“We were hoping to get ads in some of the magazines – something like ‘There are two things to do on election day’, with a picture of our record and a picture of Dukakis, the Democratic candidate, but it wasn’t possible…”

It transpires that REM have quietly invested money in Dukakis, but Stipe is worried that if he voices his opinions too publicly it might be counterproductive and many good and upright citizens might take one look at this long-haired freak supporting the Democrats and immediately vote Republican. Still, he hopes Dukakis stands a chance. »



AJ BARRETT

WorldMags.net

"I think he's a good man, all in all, he's definitely been caught up in the whole campaign thing, but who wouldn't? I do have hope for him. Certainly between the two, he's head and shoulders above Bush."

I look at some guy blissing out into a kaleidoscope and say something to the effect that people's apathy is the greatest enemy in this sort of situation.

"It's a real problem, because the country is so huge that things can't really be focused on except through the media, which completely abuses or over-dramatises events according to their whims.

"I think it's much easier in a smaller country to really have a pretty clear idea of what's going on. We're just too big… We should secede, is what we should do. Georgia seceded twice from the nation and maybe we should do it again."

Look what happened then, though!

"Yeah!"

I say I find it weird that people are so proud of the Confederate thing still…

"In the South? Who have you been talking to!?"

Just seeing the monuments, the historical data everywhere. It feels as if it infects the here and now, that it's not just an era consigned to museums…

"I could have felt that when I went to the BBC radio station in that building that was bombed and they continued to broadcast, y'know? I thought it was very strange. I think monuments to war are very strange anyway… I wrote a song about it on the last record…"

You don't often get monuments of peace. I guess people just assume peace is the norm and that war is some great event, when in fact…

"It's kinda the opposite. We're essentially a brutal race and we're gonna continue to fight with one another, but you just kinda do what you have to, you do what you can. You're only gonna be here 80 years, so…"

"Should we talk about the weather?/Should we talk about the government?" – *"Pop Song '89"*

MICHAEL STIPE SITS squinting behind thick horn-rims in the bright afternoon sun. We're out back of the 40 Watt, a club run by Peter Buck's wife, Barrie, in a yard resembling in equal parts a rubbish tip, a pub garden and an adventure playground. We're on a rickety wooden stage in two cast-iron chairs. This is Stipe's chosen spot for the interview – his first in nine months – and I hold the tape recorder as close to his chin as a razor, in the hope I pick up his voice, soft and mumbling as if to denote profundity.

Why *Green*, I wonder? I saw a Greenpeace sticker in the REM office and assumed it was something to do with conservation.

"There's all the different aspects of the word 'green', all the different ways it can be taken. One of them is definitely the political party, but there's all these other meanings… one being money, one being a sense of innocence or naivety…"

Judging from the songs titles – "Stand", "Pop Song '89" – and in comparison to "Finest Worksong" or "It's The End Of The World As We Know It (And I Feel Fine)", there appears to have been some pruning going on, some rethinking. And, from the lyrics, this album's landscape seems more internal, more personal.

"I would agree with that, definitely. *Document* was very vitriolic and loud, in terms of the lyrical content anyway, and I think this one is much more inner-landscape stuff."

"I will try to sing a happy song…" – *"Wrong Child"*.

***GREEN* DOESN'T MAKE** any sense… which makes the only sense in 1988. Half of it's bumptious, warped, electric and weird, the other half's like James Taylor with a brain, placid but troubled and… weird. It's…

"What does the phrase 'inner acclaim' mean, do you know?"

Inner…?

"Inner acclaim. Well, that kind of describes how I work. It's what I react to. There's a sense of unrest in the air, which I think is a good thing in the end, but right now it's a little overwhelming, and I think a lot of people need more upbeat music – not mindless disco but music that, perhaps, provides hope. That word has been really thrown around and bandied in rock music in the last 10 years, it's pretty much been stepped on so it's like really bad drugs. But it doesn't have to be like that, and I think I got that across in a lot of the songs."

I think the hopeful thing about *Green* is not that it's an album that's hopeful, but that it's an album that's trying to have hope. It's an honest struggle for re-education, for deliberately arming against cynicism. It's poised between attempt and achievement. It's truly romantic.

"There's no real methodical, premeditated formula to that. I didn't sit down and go, 'Music needs hope, so I'm gonna do it'. Or, 'The hope that's there is bogus and formulaic and ridiculous, and I'm gonna change that.' I mean, I have no plans to spearhead a revolution in music – I think I got over that seven or eight years ago when I realised it's just pop music after all and, yes, it can do a lot but, no, it's not a world-shaking event when a song comes out.

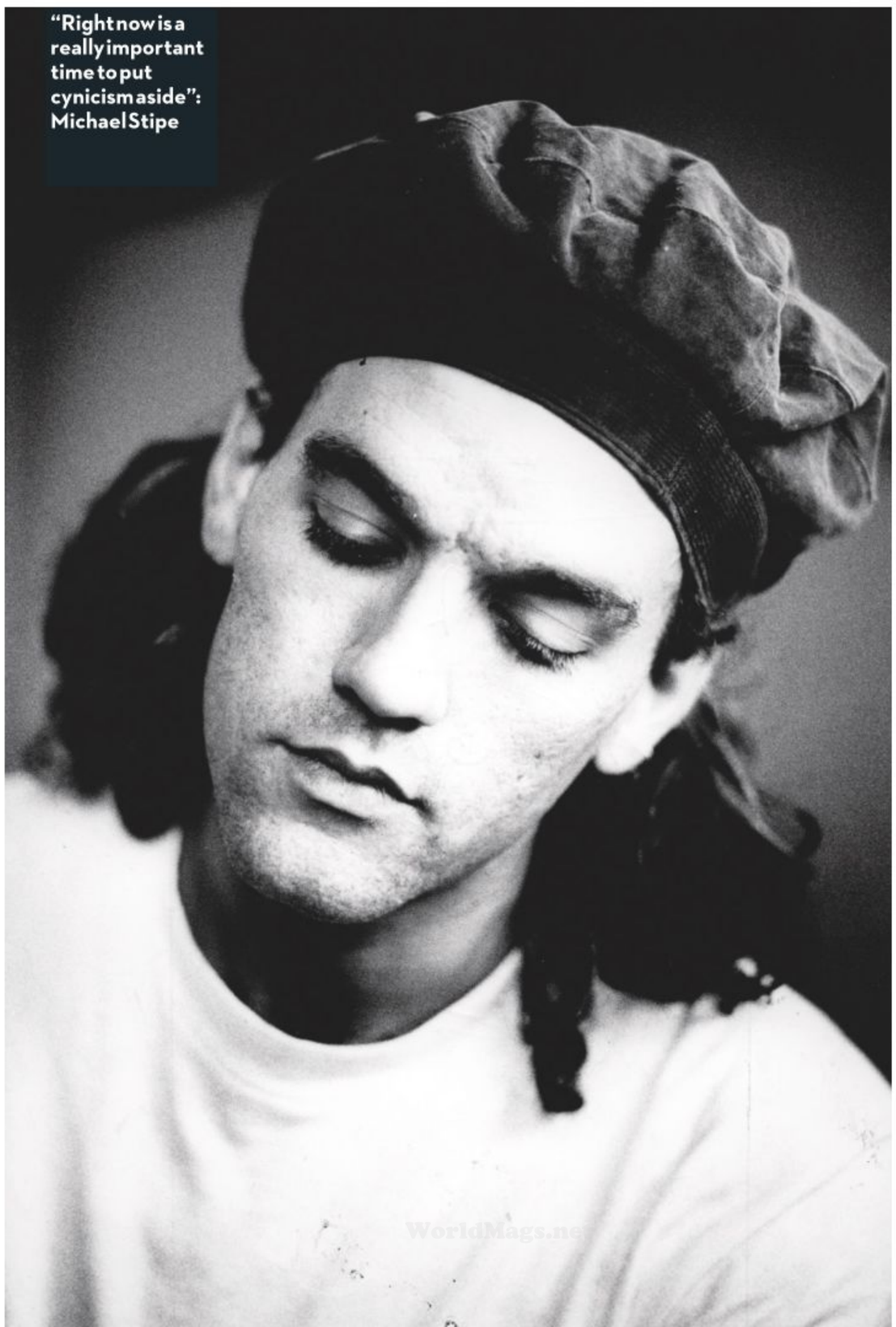
"I'd say it's just a reflection of where I am and what I'm doing in my life and it carries over. I mean, my voice is incredibly melancholy and incredibly happy at the same time, and that's just the way it comes out of my mouth, y'know?"

One track on the album – "Orange Crush" – seems out of place. It's bitter and railing, almost a throwback to *Document* with its references to Agent Orange and the appalling napalm air raids on Vietnam. It's certainly more guilty than hopeful.

"Yeah, I felt that right now is a really important time to put cynicism aside and try to focus more on how good things can be or how good things are, and 'Orange Crush' is kinda the exception. I wasn't really happy with that, but it's a great song and it works well on the record."

Two hours later, while Stipe is heading home to get his head together and combat his flu, Peter Buck reveals that Stipe's father had been a pilot in Vietnam. He won't say more and I wonder whether this is a subject Stipe would rather not discuss, whether his father ever talks about it, whether he wakes in the night screaming or just puts it behind him, whether

> "I didn't sit down and go, 'Music needs hope, so I'm gonna do it'"



"Right now is a really important time to put cynicism aside": Michael Stipe

ANDREW CAITLIN

WorldMags.net

September 12, 1987: "Orange Crush" gets an early airing when REM play a show at London's Hammersmith Odeon shortly after the release of *Document*

Stipe believes the sins of the fathers are visited on the sons. I never have the opportunity to find out. Shame.

"I think I thought you were someone else"
– "Pop Song '89"

"THERE'S THESE BIG, dumb songs on the record and I really enjoyed doing those. 'Pop Song' and 'Stand' are just like big, dumb heads rolling around. The guys had the music in the works and I just thought, 'God, this is the stupidest music I've ever heard.' It takes a great deal of courage to write a really stupid song, but those guys did it and I really admire 'em for it. I really think it was great and I wanted to match that with a lyric or voice that was equally as stupid, but… really kind of great."

I took "Pop Song '89" as a comment on the pop song, because it starts as if it's a cover of The Doors' "Hello, I Love You" but fucks it all up, stammering and gibbering, taking the piss out of Morrison's machismo, mocking the insane sexism of pop cliche. How's it go? "*Hello, I saw you, I know you, I knew you/I think I can remember your name*"?

"It's a complete piss-take, yeah. I guess it's the prototype of and, hopefully, the end of a pop song. It would be the last pop song ever. And, maybe in making the video, I'll be able to make the last video ever to the last pop song ever. I think the song really describes a lot of where music sits now."

There's one lyric on the album that struck me as being particularly sad and brave, admitting defeat in the face of profundity and yet plunging in for it all the same. It's the one that goes – and I may have this wrong – "*Run a carbon black test on my job and you'll find it's all been said before.*"

"Job, did you say?" Stipe raises his eyebrows.

Yeah.

"No, it's jaw."

That's my theory knackered.

"Oh well… I'd like to hear your theory anyway."

I thought you were saying you were making your songs as truthful as you knew how, but at the same time it doesn't really matter because the effect is minuscule and will just be passed over, like all the other cliches.

"There's an essay by Walker Percy called *Metaphor As Mistake* and, essentially, it completely supports your misinterpretation of that lyric as being much closer to the truth than the lyric could ever bring you. So, yes, you're completely right with that."

There's a double edge to "Get Up", too, the chorus insisting "*Dreams, they complicate my life*", while the backing vocals insist "*Dreams, they complement my life*". Dreams seem very important to Stipe, and I wonder if he, like me, is fascinated by the fact that, although we spend a good third of our lives asleep, dreams are not considered as real as our waking state?

"When I sleep it's pretty much a clearing house for everything that's come at me. I feel very bombarded by the 20th century in general and I accept it and I revel in it, but I also often feel like a victim of it. I think that's a very common thing, whether people recognise it or not or choose to discuss it or not."

Do you subscribe to the investigation and interpretation of dreams?

"Uh, y'know, you can ride the fence and go, 'That's interesting and there's probably some truth in it.' But I wouldn't say I read volumes of books on it and take them word for word… I wouldn't say I read at all, actually…"

The previous night, in The Grit, Stipe had admitted that studying literature as a student had spoiled reading for him, had robbed him of the blind pleasure of just enjoying the story. It's a common complaint. When I left college, I too was unable to open a book without picking the fabric to bits. But it's a phase of hyper-criticism that passes, and Stipe said he was currently thoroughly engaged by a book written by a paraplegic who picked out the words on the keys of his typewriter with a probe fastened to his forehead.

Sitting here out back of the 40 Watt, shivering in the sun, Stipe is trying to remember whether he remembers many of his dreams. "It comes and goes," he concludes, and I say something like it's odd how we can't choose what we remember, which sets him off on another tangent.

"I've read that every sound that's ever made goes out into space and it's there forever and that every stimulus, everything that you see or hear that goes into your head, stays there forever and it's just your particular »

RICHARD BELLIA

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Rolodex that decides which ones get stomped on and which ones get thrown away and which ones tick… That sounds a little weird, doesn't it? I must be feverish…

"I'm really intrigued by memory. It can take the real and unreal and combine them so that you really can't remember if you went to church without your pants on when you were three years old or if you dreamed it or thought or imagined it. Um… photography has come into the world and altered that a little bit, because we now have documented ways of proving. 'Yes, I was in church without my pants on' or 'No, I wasn't'. Or, 'Yes, my mother put me in the cedar chest when I was bad' or 'No, she says she didn't'."

Have you ever got into a situation where you've told a story so many times that you can't remember whether it's true or not any more? Y'know, you may have embellished something but now it's become true?

"Yes. That's a problem we had with our president of the last eight years. Y'know, he was a movie star? Well, there was a study done showing anecdotes that he would tell earlier in his… reign… where he would talk about this character that he played and say that this character would do something in this film. And later on it became not this character, it became him. There's actual television broadcasts that bump these one by one, and you watch this story become completely hyperbolised to where, y'know, a character he played in *Bonzo Goes To Washington* or whatever becomes him and Nancy in 1985. It's pretty scary."

"History is made to seem unfair" *– "California".*

WOULD YOU PREFER not to be living in this particular time?

"No, I would never say that. I think it's a really exciting time to live in, but with that comes utter confusion. You can't really make pat statements about the way civilisation has taken us. I mean, we're here and that's that. Ha! That's probably the most pat statement that could ever be made! It is very difficult, though, and sometimes that hits me very strongly.

"I just have this whole feeling that, in the end, you have to accept the toxic waste and the Naugahyde with the beauty and the ability to… uh… heal the eyes of an 80-year-old woman who hasn't been able to see for 10 years or whatever through laser technology. You just have to accept the real beauty with the ugliness."

Isn't that what this album says?

"I think they all do. Maybe this one's a little clearer."

"California" seems tainted by mortality, the gorgeous nostalgia of the cinematic images shadowed with the realisation of futility, of death. What are you saying there – is it "*The edge of a continent*" or "*The end of a continent*"…?

"Edge, I think I say 'end' once."

Well, that double entendre started me off again…

"Yeah, I'm just loaded with 'em, aren't I? I just spew 'em out all over the place."

He laughs and I ask if this quality of creative confusion is nurtured or accidental.

"I kind of agree with Burroughs when he said language is a virus from outer space. I don't agree with a lot that man says, but I think he's kinda correct there. I was thinking about that this morning. I appreciate language and I appreciate the different ways that we can abuse it or use it, or twist it around to make beautiful shapes on the ends of our fingers. And y'know, in terms of communicating, it works sometimes and sometimes it doesn't. So… it's a big kinda mystery…"

Do you ever get that thing where you're typing and you make a mistake, but when you look at the word it makes sense, another sense, almost like a miracle, and you leave it because it's like divine intervention?

"Yeah! The name of the album was a typo that I made and liked and it kinda stuck. The thing that brought it out to me was that, instead of hitting the 'r' in 'Green', I hit a '4', which is right above the 'r' on the typewriter.

"I find that working with a typewriter gives you an objectivity you don't have when you're handwriting something, or even when you're dictating into a tape recorder. It's very freeing in that way for me."

It's a very athletic process, typing…

"Yeah, mine's a real old one. Ha ha. It kinda creaks and sticks… My 'w's always stick, so now, when I hit a 'w', I automatically go up and pull it back down without thinking about it."

> "I don't really like being misperceived as being shamanistic"

"It's a really good thing that we're doing": REM at Athens' Morton Theatre – (l–r) Michael Stipe, Bill Berry, Mike Mills and Peter Buck

AJ BARRETT

So if you ever got a new one, you'd still be doing that out of habit?

"I did get a new one and I discarded it. I couldn't work with it. It was too… um… The sounds that it made were really annoying. It was an AT&T, which is a terrible American corporation. But they had really great typeset – it's one that you can't find very much any more. It's called Order 10, and I guess it was a typeset that was made for people who were reading speeches. It's very beautiful, and I only know of one typewriter that has that that's not computerised… and it's in New York City right now."

Do you surprise yourself? Do you write things and read them back later and think, "Where in heaven or hell did that come from?"

"Oh yeah. A lot of things that I wind up using, I have no idea where they came from, or I've written it on the back of an envelope while driving and not had any recollection of writing it except for one small phrase and the handwriting in that one phrase will clue me in that I didn't steal it off a billboard or that someone wasn't talking to me and I just copied down what they said."

Do you keep notebooks of stuff?

"Yeah, I have volumes. I'll probably release them next year as a book because… Well, I feel like I'm only gonna be here for 80 years, so why not thoroughly embarrass myself?"

Do you seek immortality through art, then?

"Yeah, I think it's inherent – everyone has

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that desire, whether it's through children or a house that they've built out of granite that they hope will stand there or a song or a piece of writing that they've done."

I was going to ask you about children – do you have any desire to have any?

"Yeah… I don't know when. I'm not ready for it now. My parents had three kids by the time they were my age, and things have just changed that much in a 20-year time period that pretty much everyone I know is really not at all interested in having children until later on in life."

Are you not responsible enough at the moment?

"I think I'm too egotistical, I'm too self-serving. I wouldn't be able to fully dedicate myself to the degree that I would like to. I've really thought about it a lot and, y'know, I would do it but it would be pretty self-defeating, and it may turn out to be a disaster because I'm not sure that I'm ready to be a good father yet. It just kinda comes."

> "I wanted *Green* to be acoustic, but those guys said, 'C'mon!'"

"What I choose/Not to do" *– "Inside Out"*

DO PEOPLE CONSIDER you pretentious because they think you're an artist?

"Yeah. But if you look up the roots of the word pretentious, it actually doesn't mean what it implies at all. I know exactly what you're talking about, though, and I really despise that term. For me, anyway, it means that I have to prove myself, and I don't feel like I have to prove or need to prove or… I really hate that."

Isn't the suspicion about art that someone who claims to be an artist is invariably someone who is more interested in being seen to be one than in expressing themselves or discovering themselves?

"It's kinda… Can you repeat that at all? I had this really sharp thought and I lost it completely in the chitter…"

I was saying that people who claim to be artists are invariably people who…

"Whatever you get out of the songs is just because that's the way I occupy my time. Y'know, that's what I do. It's just the same as being a dishwasher and just trying to do the very best job that you can, being proud of the work that you do."

Oh come on! There's far more sense of achievement and self-examination in writing a song than messing with suds!

"Well, there is in the sense that you're putting it out in front of people and saying, 'Here's my internal organs – don't eviscerate me, let me do it myself.'"

Are you torn between the exhibitionist urge and the desire for privacy?

"Yeah, I often question what it is in me and in a lot of my contemporaries who are also involved in music or whatever else that makes that performing, that exhibitionism, a vital part of me. What is it in me that makes me have to do that or makes me crave that or desire that? It's a very kind of weird thing to try and come to terms with."

Any conclusions about it?

"Nope! I'm only 28 – give me a break! You know, I have no answers to anything, I'm just kind of questioning with everyone else."

But a lot of young people look upon you as a sort of guru. Maybe it's because, in sympathising and sharing your confusion, they mistake it for wisdom.

"Yeah, that's scary, isn't it… ha ha… Count No Count… that was what they called Faulkner when he would walk around Oxford, Mississippi. Count No Count because he would dress up in these outrageous costumes and walk downtown and he had all these pretensions about… He was very eccentric…

"I don't really like being misperceived as being shamanistic or some man of wisdom or something like that, because I don't think I am."

"The stars are the greatest thing you've ever seen/And they're there for you alone" *– "Everything"*

"EVERYTHING INTRIGUES ME. If I've got it right, it's got something to do with one's relationship with the world, how being the centre of it and being totally lost in it, being full of ego and being completely drained of ego, amount to the self same thing, the same experience. Am I along the right lines?

"It's pretty cyclical… I would say, yeah, you're pretty right there."

What makes you lose yourself completely? What's the most awe-inspiring thing for you?

At this precise moment a car roars by along the road behind the fence. Stipe pauses for 10 seconds, then says, "Driving 120 miles an hour down the freeway in a souped-up… No, I can't really say."

You may call "Stand" a big dumb-head pop song, but it still seems to articulate something about reawakening to your surroundings. Y'know, "*Stand in the place where you live now and think about direction and wonder why you have it now*"… Do you live with things for ages and then suddenly, surprisingly, see them as if for the first time?

"Yeah, I think everyone does that… everyone who's kind of aware, anyway… It surprises me when I walk by a parking lot and I've been walking by that parking lot for eight years but, for the first time, I look at it and say, 'My God, there's a parking lot!' and wonder why, for eight years, I've chosen not to look at it…"

Can you train yourself to be more aware? Because that's what the album seems to be about?

"Yeah, but that's kinda Pavlovian. I think to not try is even better, to really not try."

What, just to lose yourself in it?

"Yeah… I feel like I've had this conversation with you before…"

"This is my life and my time and I have been given the freedom to do as I see fit" *– "World Leader Pretend"*

"A LOT OF PEOPLE have put a lot of emphasis on how my writing and my voice have changed dramatically from *Murmur* to now, but it's a very simple thing. *Document* was the first time in my career as a recording… artist… that I understood recording and I felt like I definitely had the upper hand and wasn't becoming a victim of the process, which is extremely involved and difficult and leaves you with what would be a very positive situation – having so many options – becoming a very difficult situation. Because you have so many options, that there's endless ways that you can go, it can just become maddening.

"I'm very wary of electricity anyway, and the fact that my entire career is built around it and everything that comes out of that – all the product or things that I have to show from that involve electricity – is very strange to me."

I see you chose to resume your relationship with producer Scott Litt – what was the idea for the sound of *Green*?

"I wanted it to be completely acoustic, but those guys dragged me out of the river and shook me off and said, 'C'mon!' So, we had a pretty good combination of what all four of us really wanted, which was a lot of loud and a lot of quiet."

Why completely acoustic?

"I just felt it was time for me to do that."

"I'm not supposed to be like this/But it's OK" *– "Wrong Child".*

REM HAVE JUST signed to Warner Brothers. Did it make any great difference to your outlook on the group?

"I had to reassess the last seven years and decide whether or not I wanted to take that big of a leap… And it is a huge, really colossal leap for us as a band and as a business and as everything else that we are… as friends. Having assessed that, I decided, yeah, I wanna keep doing this »

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"I really hate America. We've turned into such selfish bastards": Peter Buck (left, with Michael Stipe) contemplates the 1988 presidential election

and I wanna work with these people and I really admire them and I really love them and I think that it's a really good thing that we're doing. And I felt like we had a couple more records inside of us that were really great.

"Y'know, it's been said a million times, but rock'n'roll is not something that I wanna be doing when I'm 40 years old. I mean, I feel what I do is not real rock'n'roll anyway… I mean it's not terribly rock'n'roll but… it is too."

"If wishes were trees/The trees would be falling"
– "Stand"

> "Rock'n'roll is not something I wanna be involved in when I'm 40"

"I TEND TO BLANCH when I look back, but at the same time, there's a lot that's given a lot of people a lot of things, so I think it's probably a good thing that it's happened."

IRS, REM's old label, have just released *Eponymous*, a compilation of the band's "greatest hits", and despite loathing such a notion, Stipe collaborated to make the best of a bad job. How does he feel about it?

"I don't think I would ever listen to it. There are only two songs I like on it – the two I say I like in the liner notes. My greatest hits of the last five records would be very different from that and would probably be incredibly boring. I don't think anyone would really enjoy listening to the songs that I find really moving and I've found have stood up well over a couple of years' time. Y'know, I hope that people who have been listening all along, in 10 years' time can listen to the records again and go, 'God, there was something there and I really still like this'."

Are the songs a form of diary?

"Yeah, but a very vague one. It's not very specific at all. My haircuts tend to change. Y'know, 'Well, I think I had white, short hair then and red eyebrows, so that must have been the end of '85 – it kind of falls like that."

So when's the next haircut?

"Soon. I'm gonna have one like you [bald]."

Very wise – you don't have to wash it.

"Yeah – that's my main concern, really. It's really great having long hair, except when you have to deal with it every day. I really like it a lot, this big hunk of thing behind me. It grows really fast."

"It's a beautiful life, my life/It's a beautiful life, your life…" *– "Hairshirt"*

ANDREW CATLIN

MICHAEL STIPE MAKES his excuses and leaves. The last time I see him is later that night, sitting cross-legged on the floor of the 40 Watt, surrounded by disciples. On stage a girl with Tracy Chapman's jeans and a belting country twang is slaughtering Neil Young's "Cowgirl In The Sand". Stipe is smiling beatifically, rapt in her dismal performance, and I'd say he was on drugs but he's too health-conscious for that. He's also too intelligent to be a born again. Suddenly, he produces a notebook and theatrically starts to scribble.

He notices I notice, and I wonder where the poet ends and the pose begins. *Steve Sutherland*

— MELODY MAKER NOVEMBER 5 —

"WE'RE PIGS! AMERICANS are pigs! You can quote me on that. And d'you know what? I think I'm gonna be a pig that owns a gun! I'm so fucking furious, I feel like shooting people – George Bush first and then the people who vote for him."

Peter Buck rocks back in his chair and spills Bloody Mary over his new check suit.

"I hate this country, I really hate America. We've turned into such selfish bastards. If Adolf Hitler came back and said, 'I won't raise taxes', he'd win in a landslide. I'm washing my hands of it. I don't give a shit. We're essentially a nation of fat-assed used-car salesmen that wanna protect our pile. That's all we are, and that disgusts me."

We're in the GA Bar, a dusty jukebox joint just around the corner from REM's office in Athens, Georgia. It's about five in the afternoon and shafts of sunlight dazzle Buck as he negotiates his eighth Bloody Mary – "Absolut vodka, no celery" – attempting to stave off jetlag. He was in London yesterday, working as "Honestly, I'm a little tipsy, but I have a phrase for it… What is it? I'm a semi-official, semi-permanent, unpaid rhythm guitar player" with Robyn Hitchcock, and he's been up since four this morning, attempting to dull his dizzy senses with wine, beer… anything. But, for all the alcohol, one spectre haunts him – the forthcoming American election.

"That asshole Bush is going to win and I'm gonna be one of those old crazy guys who builds fences around his house and thinks that having

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weapons isn't a bad idea because, with someone like Bush, who's funded by the moral majority and is a criminal, I can't imagine what's gonna happen to us."

Buck scowls into his drink and explains that Texas is bankrupt right now because, when Bush was governor, he relaxed the savings and loan laws for his oilmen cronies. He says it's costing the government 100 trillion dollars – money that they've borrowed from Japan. He foresees economic ruin, a depression far worse than the one in the '30s. He sees global destruction…

"I'd move somewhere if I thought there was any better place to move. I mean, Europe's an American missile base, Canada… I don't wanna live in the tundra! I'd rather take my chance with the bomb.

"We have a thing that we all kinda jokingly call the Suicide Club. If it looks like the war's coming and the bombs are gonna drop, we're gonna buy a Cadillac, get in with a bottle of vodka, drive to the nearest drop point and sit there and wait for the bomb to drop so that we get destroyed on the first go. I don't wanna live in a post-nuclear world. Well, we do, I guess, after Japan, but that wasn't my fault…"

Buck quits ranting to order another round and I take the opportunity to enquire whether he reckons Dukakis stands a ghost of a chance?

"Well, I'm gonna vote for him. I gave money to his campaign and he's obviously the better man. He's the only honest one running, but really, anyone who wants to be a politician is not qualified. Hell, I don't even like Dukakis – he's a politician. They should all be shot.

"D'you know the weirdest thing? Everything that Reagan's done that I hate and despise benefits me. I mean, you wouldn't believe how much less tax I pay – it went down from 44 per cent to 28 per cent. I don't wanna put money into cruise missiles, but I want money to go to people who are hungry, I want money to go to people who need houses… and he cuts the tax and what's left goes to make bombs. That's obscene!"

The drinks arrive. He takes a slug.

"I recommend anyone reading this who's a psycho and can buy a gun to shoot George Bush. I'm serious. I would consider it myself. I live in a country that I hate! I live in a country where I wanna shoot politicians, where the only way you can make a real dent is not voting, it's murder.

"Still, you've got Maggie Thatcher – she'll be there until the turn of the century, so… at least we have a chance of getting rid of our… king… or whatever. You're the same fucking country except you don't have bombs. We can blow up everyone in the world and y'all can't – that's the only difference. It doesn't matter. We're all gonna blow each other up. The world's gonna end. Who cares? I'm definitely not making plans for my retirement."

He rubs his hands across his eyes. There's a country song on the jukebox and a rasta at the bar.

"I don't feel real optimistic. I live in a small town. I'm happily married. We'll have children. Our children will grow up and I don't expect it to last much past the time they're 25… Look! Don't get me started on politics!"

He pounds the table with his fist.

"I mean just… DON'T!… It fucking sucks! I get really furious, to the point where I start wanting to kick things."

Well, we don't want you thrown out of the bar this early. Think what it would do for your reputation.

"Right! They usually throw me out around 12! I can get as drunk as I want in this place and pick a fight or, y'know, get a fight picked, and be thrown out on my face and nobody cares. Not that I do that… much.

"Every year there's a new crop of 18-year-old college students and, for about a week and a half, seeing members of REM is the biggest thing in the world. And then after that it's like, 'Who gives a fuck?' I'm out every day, I come here. I go to my wife's club and hang out. I go see bands. I go eat out – y'know, I never eat at home. I like to walk. I'm always wandering places.

"It's easy to live here. I don't even have a car that runs, really. I've got that old '57 Chevy that's picking up tickets as we speak, but essentially I just ride my bike everywhere. We all live within half a mile of the office. I could take off my clothes and hold my breath and run naked to Bill's house – it's that close. And Mike and Michael's house… I couldn't hold my breath, but I could probably still run naked there and no one would notice. It's within two blocks, and I like it like that.

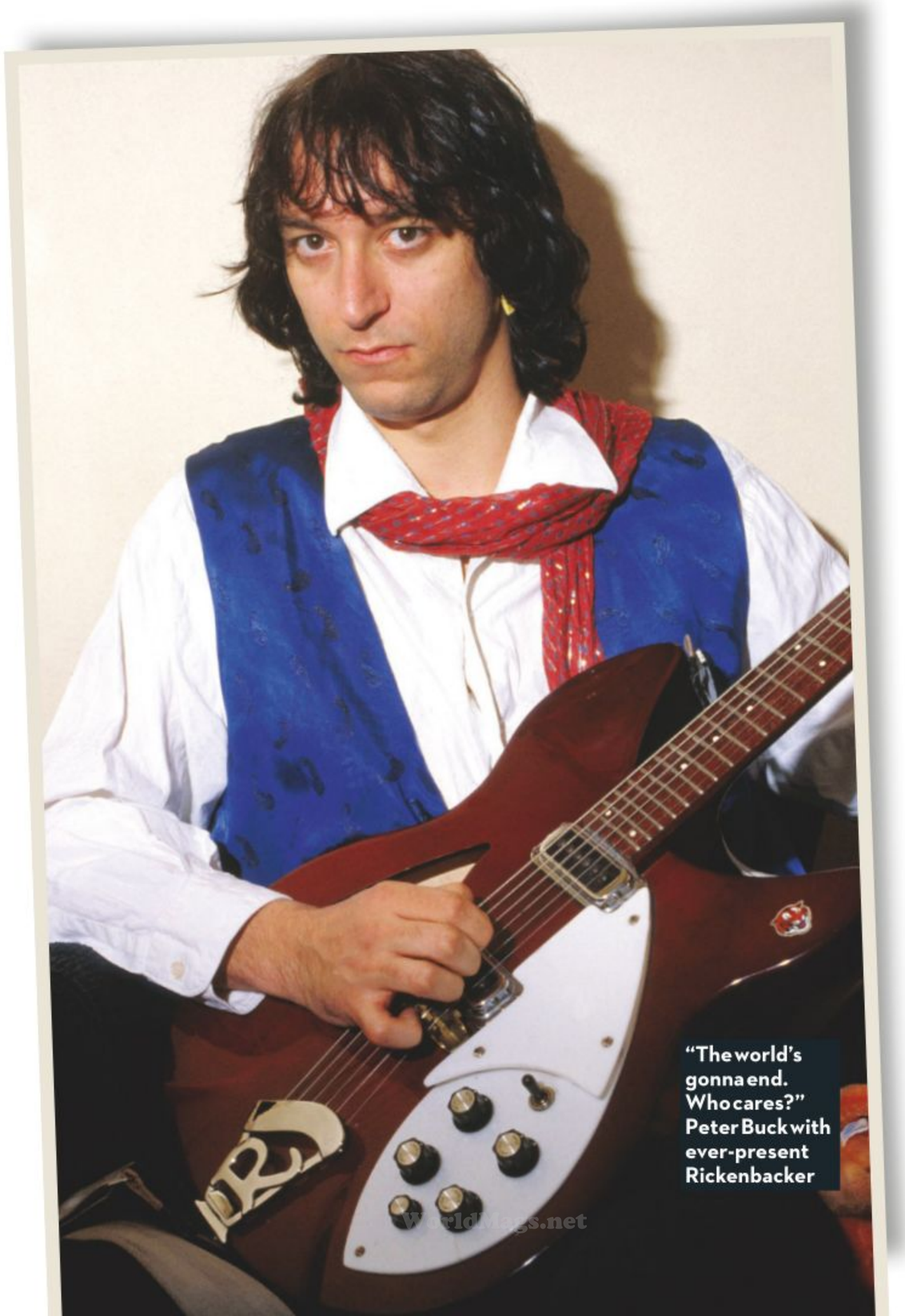
"I live in the silliest-looking house in town. It's 100 years old, so it wasn't my fault. It looks like a birthday cake designed by a blind man… There's something really great about just being able to come back to a place, especially for our band. Either Michael or I would turn into Syd Barrett if we were in a showbiz situation all the time. We come back here and – fuck, man – I can walk downtown in my underwear and no one gives a shit. I've walked in here in a dress before and nobody cares."

Does your wife know about that?

"That's why she married me. She loves a man in a nice frock… No, it's just one of those things that, every once in a while, when we play, we decide we're gonna wear dresses, although I usually wear pants underneath. Y'know, going out and having a couple of drinks with makeup on in some manly redneck bar is always kinda neat. And, of course, no one ever says anything. It's like, 'If this guy comes in here and he's wearing a dress, he's gotta be as bad as anyone in this bar.' Which, of course, is not true… although I do carry a knife. But, fuck, I don't think I'd get it out of my pocket fast enough…"

Buck goes for the draw, fumbles around in his suit and eventually produces a flick knife. I reckon I could have shot him, oh, at least half-a-dozen times.

"It's an old Mexican switchblade. I've carried a knife since I was 13… never used it, never want to. I mostly use it to open mail and cut twine. I dunno, I guess it's some teenage myth – I guess I just saw too many James Dean movies when I was 13… It's funny, I can't think of anyone who's less violent than me… unless it's Michael."



"The world's gonna end. Who cares?" Peter Buck with ever-present Rickenbacker

GRAHAM TUCKER / GETTY

ONLY AN HOUR ago, REM's singer and lyricist, Michael Stipe, was giving me a fair impersonation of David Sylvian. In comparison, Buck's like Keef Richards or something.

"Well, Michael's really quiet most of the time, but there's a side of him that most people don't really see, the rowdy thing. It's something he does for the public at large, but y'know, he's a complete person, he's not like some art weirdo who sits around and meditates all the time. Everyone in England seems to think he's some kind of weird nutcase when, in fact, he's one of the most sensible people I know. I mean, he manages to live his life exactly the way he wants to with absolutely no concessions to anyone's idea of the way life should be lived, and get away with it. I can't think of anything more sensible than that…

"I'm sorry. The train of thought just pulled out of the station. What was I talking about?"

Buck greets a couple of friends – one of whom sold him his Chevy. Roy Orbison gives way to Aretha Franklin's "Spanish Harlem" on the jukebox and Buck moves into mock-maudlin mode.

"I'm not a boring person, but I feel so boring talking about myself. »

There's nothing more boring than sitting in a place and describing what your inner feelings are – you always sound like Jackson Browne.

"I haven't done an interview in months, so I haven't even made up my mind yet about the record and things. I guess I'll just lie a whole bunch. Nick Cave seems to have the lie business down pretty good – ripped untimely from the womb and his twin brother dies… The thing is, I really like his records. They're pretentious in a way that I can appreciate."

Let's talk about your new album. Why call it *Green*?

"We never talked about why, but my opinion is that green is everything that you want – youth, maturity, growth, strength, and also it's – uh – money and all the other kinda nasty, grubby things. I guess it's slightly tongue-in-cheek, because everyone's picture of us now must be these rock-star millionaires who sign to Warner Brothers and they took the banknotes to us in a truck. It was actually just a small car…"

He says the Warners deal gives REM "the complete ability to do whatever we want to. Essentially, they can never not put out our records. We could make four records of us belching and farting and telling Benny Hill jokes with a huge penis on the cover and they have to put it out. That's the follow-up to this one, of course… We've already recorded it! It'll be called 'Bog'!"

Are you surprised at how big REM have become?

"Yes, I kinda thought that us having a hit single would be one of the seven signs of the end of the world! What's the others? Fish falling outta the sky? Oh, there goes the trout!"

He grins as the photographer brings another round.

"It is very, very tough being rich. I mean, my butler's quit, the chauffeur's made the scullery maid pregnant and the indentured servants are making far too much noise. I'm not sure what to do. I'm thinking of giving it all away and going back to Beverly Hills, y'know, to a small-level bit of richness."

Or you could just buy Athens and…

"Burn it down! Yes, and start over…" He laughs: "I guess we're probably not known as a fun band. Judging from what fans tend to tell us, I think we get people who tend to sit and think about the records a lot and relate to them real personally. In a way, that's why we do this, but on the other hand, I like to put on a record and just hop around the house and have a beer, so… y'know, the Ramones are probably my favourite current rock'n'roll band… and The Cramps before that. So I think there has been a bit of an attempt on this album to just be – I hate to use this phrase because it's so '70s – but just kinda boogie, y'know.

"I mean, something like 'Stand' is so dumb that we wouldn't have written that two years ago. It's very simple and it's got three chords and I play a wah-wah guitar solo…"

Yes, it's a corker!

"Isn't it? Everyone was outta the studio and I literally said, 'Listen, what does this need? It's gotta have a solo', so I went out and bought a wah-wah pedal. I'd never even played one. I said to the guy, 'Is this a good one?' And he said, 'I don't know, I think wah-wahs all suck.' So I said, 'Well, is this a good one that sucks?' And he said, 'Yeah, sure…' So I took it back to the studio and, without even playing with it, I just plugged it in and said, 'I'm gonna do this solo right now', and I did two solos and picked one of 'em.

"When the others came back, I said, 'You've gotta hear this!' And when it came on, Bill fell literally off his chair onto the floor and just started howling and pounding the floor with his hands. It was perfect. That totally says it all for me.

"And Michael heard it, and you know Michael, he looked at me and just went, 'Mmmm,' and then kinda giggled as much as to say, 'You have to live this down, not me.' Everyone was in favour of that kinda stupidity. Stupidity's great… as opposed to being ignorant.

"You see, I don't wanna be the king of the jangle guitar, and in a way I don't want us to be known as this sensitive, anxiety-ridden band. Y'know, we're that but we're also dumb guys who like to play Ramones songs in practice, and I guess we wanted this to be more of an up record."

> "The '60s was just a bullshit revolution that was televised"

Stipe said something about the album being hopeful, whereas I think its fascination lies in its trying to be hopeful.

"Well, hope is trying. When you're in the perfect place in the perfect world, you don't need hope. Hope is a kinda sad thing in a lot of ways, because it means that, maybe in the worst of times, you can think about the best."

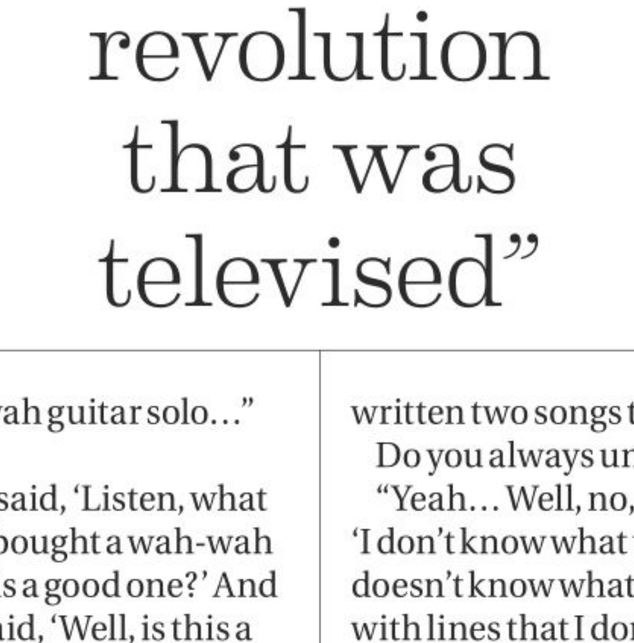
There's a fair amount of head-scratching "What's-Stipe-on-(about)-now" on the album…

"This one is probably the closest that people can get to… I mean, I don't think we've ever even written two songs that are in the first person and yet this whole record is."

Do you always understand the lyrics?

"Yeah… Well, no, not always. There's songs on every record where I go, 'I don't know what the fuck he's talking about.' But I'm sure Bob Dylan doesn't know what he's talking about sometimes, too. There are songs with lines that I don't understand and I prefer not to know. Like in 'World Leader Pretend' there's a line that I hate – '*Let my machine talk to me*'. I don't know what that means, although the rest of the song is very clear.

"I don't know if that line means anything to Michael or whether it's just in there to fill up space because it's the end of the bridge. And, really, I don't care…"



Yeah, that line sounds like it should be in a Gary Numan song.

"Well, I mentioned it to him and he said, 'Well, it's there', and I'm not gonna say, 'Well, why?' because he doesn't ask me, 'Why do you play this note?' It's like I never understood what 'Laughing' was about… or 'Harborcoat' on the second record, but I have a real good idea about the rest of 'em and, if I'm wrong, it's only because I'm just another fan who's intuiting and putting myself into it. But, unlike most fans, I actually know Michael, so if I think he's writing about me, he might very well be. I mean, there are a couple

AJ BARRETT

"We wanted this to be more of an up record": Peter Buck on REM's sixth studio album, *Green*

of songs that I think he's written about me, but I'm not gonna say, 'Michael, is that a warning?', y'know…"

Stipe told me that he listens to nothing and you listen to everything.

"It's like a lot of things between Michael and I – it's the opposite side of the coin but means the same thing. Michael believes that, if you listen to nothing, you won't be influenced and it comes from your heart. I believe that, if you listen to every single thing around, there's no way you're gonna be influenced.

"This week I've been listening to Public Enemy and Astor Piazzolla, and that'll never turn up in our music. I buy millions of records, whereas Michael likes to sit at home and listen to Balinese temple music… which I listen to also. They're both equally valid ways to do it."

BESIDES BLOODY MARYS and *Green*, Buck says he likes Sonic Youth, loves Savage Republic, and has just bought *Hot Chocolate's Greatest Hits*. He says of The Young Gods, who he saw playing in London: "All you need to do is play Suicide's first album, or even the one Ric Ocasek produced, and you know everything you need to know about them", and he reckons that, although U2 are a great group, they're not that great and that, in trying to usurp the whole of rock history with *Rattle And Hum*, in trying to suggest all rock was leading up to them, they've created a monstrous conceit.

The guy who sold Buck the Chevy moseys over to tell him that he has two wrecks in his lot, so there are spares any time he needs them. The Byrds come on the jukebox and Buck says he may not tour again after this one because he's pissed off with playing venues that he wouldn't go to see bands in himself. More Bloody Marys appear, with beers on the side, and I mention "Orange Crush", a song on the new album that appears to be about Vietnam. Being a bit worse for wear myself, I ask him why Americans make such a big deal about it. After all, we Europeans are having wars all the time.

"Because, 20 years after the war, some people are finally coming to terms with the fact that we did something that was morally ambiguous."

There seems to be a great deal of glorification of it… especially in the cinema.

"Sylvester Stallone does it – so fuck him right up the butt! I hate Sylvester Stallone! He's a rotten fucking asshole. He should be shot. So should Chuck Norris. That was an obscene part of our heritage. People were stolen out of the American dream and dropped into the American nightmare. It was a national sin and everybody should know that. We are criminals for doing that… just as y'all are criminals for going to the Falklands."

Rambo worked, though…

"Yeah, so do porn movies and so does all the stupidest, lowest-common-denominator type of stuff. You know Sylvester Stallone went to Switzerland to avoid the draft to Vietnam and then he makes these movies. He's a despicable person."

Would you have avoided the draft?

"Yes. But then, I probably would have gone to jail. No… no, no… I'm not a good enough person to have done that. I would have applied for conscientious objection and probably what would have happened, knowing me, is that they wouldn't have taken me and I would have gone to Canada. That's the coward's way out, but it's much better than Dan Quayle pulling his family ties to get into the National Guard."

It's sad how war tends to stimulate the economy and we continue to fight.

"Yeah, I think human beings are a very nasty creation. Our first impulse is to ruin and destroy."

Sometimes I feel we reached a peak of civilisation in the '60s and, since then…

"No, that is hippy revisionist bullshit! Essentially what happened was, everyone was feeling a period of prosperity and there were rich kids who were able to pretend to be idealistic for a certain number of years until they reached reality, which is you've gotta have a job.

"Fuck, I come from a middle-class family and I've never had a week where I could fuck off and loon around and take LSD and dance around. If I wanted to take acid – and I did 400 times in the past – I had to go to work the next fucking morning.

"The '60s was just a bullshit revolution that was advertised. Y'know, you could have sold soap the way you sold hippies and revolution. I hate the '60s. I hate those people. It's garbage. It really… bothers me…

"Yes, there were great protests and stuff, but the only time that anything was ever accomplished was by the people who worked with Martin Luther King, who were lower-class blacks. The middle class has never done anything. The middle class are wankers. When the revolution comes, they should shoot all of us… But, hopefully, not me…"

He laughs, a little embarrassed by the way the Bloody Marys got him talking. We have one for the road, talk him out of driving and head out into the Athens sunshine, me to listen to *Green* one more time, Buck to sleep the sleep of the righteous. *Steve Sutherland* •

44 MELODY MAKER, November 5 1988

BUCKSHOT AND BLUES

R.E.M.'S NEW ALBUM, 'GREEN', IS ALREADY BEING HAILED BY THOSE IN THE KNOW AS ONE OF THE MOST INNOVATIVE AND INTRIGUING RECORDS OF THE YEAR. FOLLOWING

"WE'RE PIGS! AMERICANS ARE PIGS! You can quote me on that. And, d'you know what? I think I'm gonna be a pig that owns a gun! I'm so f***ing furious, I feel like shooting people — George Bush first and then the people who vote for him."

Peter Buck rocks back in his chair and spills Bloody Mary over his new check suit.

and can buy a gun to shoot George Bush. I'm serious. I would consider it myself. I live in a country that I hate! I live in a country where I wanna shoot politicians, where the only way you can make a real dent is not voting, it's murder.

"Still, you've got Maggie Thatcher — she'll be there

use it to open mail and cut twine, I dunno, I guess it's some teenage myth — I guess I just saw too many James Dean movies when I was 13… It's funny, I can't think of anyone who's less violent than me… unless it's Michael."

1988

OCTOBER–DECEMBER

October 27, 1988: Nick Cave "resorts to cabaret" as Bad Seed Blixa Bargeld strikes "a consumptive pose" at the Town & Country Club, North London

WorldMags.net

Flings himself into the myth

MM NOV 5 The many guises of Nick Cave & The Bad Seeds.

CARNEGIE HALL
NEW YORK
LIVE!
OCTOBER 17

WHO IS HE now? Look, he's Lon Chaney Sr in the silent *Phantom Of The Opera* with his mask just torn off. Yeah, and... Who is he now? Close your eyes and listen and he's any old drunk on the corner, serenading a ghost. Yeah, and... Who Nick Cave is really now is... Nick Cave. He's been going so long, he's become his own reference point. This comes as a bit of a shock.

Five years or so he's been doing this, putting the ham into *Hamlet* for these crowded disciples gathered in old dancehalls. Poor sod, he's got nowhere to go; there's no up or bigger in sight and down's not really a smart career option. So, here's Nick being Nick, a serious comedian. It's hard work and he works hard, flings himself into the myth with all his new, cleaned-out might, doing what he always did, taking the piss out of cliches because, hell, that's all there is to do. It's pretty sad when you think about it.

The press are taking pot shots because we suddenly realise that this elegant sulk has been calling us parasites for years when, really, he's the one who's gorging himself on other people's legends. Without Elvis, without Orbison, poor Nick wouldn't have a job to go to.

So, what does happen when you parody self-parody, when you've tied yourself in a knot that tight? It just all comes out straight and you're in big, bad trouble. The people who've come to laugh are left no option but to appreciate, and quite frankly, poor Nick's canon can't cut it. From "From Her To Eternity" (a good idea, a neat conceit, but a bad actuality – like Morrissey, Cave's titles are often too good for his songs), to the sloppy doo-wop "Deanna", his band are getting found out like crazy. Blixa's consumptive pose, isolated from the maelstrom, is pitiful. Harvey just about holds it together at the seams and Nick... well, crooning when he should be clowning, he can't hit any notes, let alone negotiate the drama.

Like Morrissey, Cave's titles are often too good for his songs

His interpretation of "By The Time I Get To Phoenix" should have been slaughtered at birth. I mean, just what is it he's saying? Just what is the point? I hate it when poor Nick resorts to that refuge of the clueless – cabaret. I hate it when he attempts to glorify his lack of purity, when he camps up his lack of ideas.

He's best – nay, brilliant – when he does just what the crowd wants him to do, when his wounded pride rebounds from self-pity into attack. Hence "Sugar Sugar Sugar" gave us oblivion to pogo to, and "The Mercy Seat" was a cyclone, a frenzy that sucked us into its rabid monotony. He should have just played that for an hour, then knobbed off home. But then, maybe that would have been too brave? *Steve Sutherland*

October 28, 1988: en route to the Odeon, Jimmy Page performs at the Nassau Coliseum, Uniondale, New York

HAMMERSMITH ODEON
LONDON
LIVE!
NOVEMBER 24

Hard as nails

MM DEC 3 Led Zep greats rewired by Jimmy Page on the *Outrider* tour.

LEGEND HAS IT that Gerald Ford couldn't walk and chew gum at the same time. He'd be no match for Jason Bonham. Jason, 21 going on 41, is the first drummer I've ever seen puffing away on fag after fag, not between the breaks but actually during the songs. Between the breaks, he's too busy rifling through a beer crate behind the kit. Never let it be said that young Jason isn't taking a similar approach to the artillery as his dear departed dad did.

Essentially this sums up the main difference between Jimmy Page's phoenix-like foray back into the thick of it and former sparring partner Robert Plant's. While Robert got all professional and looked to pop for a renewal on the lease, Page seems content as a sitting tenant, clinging on to his old blues riffs and watching the world pass him by.

There again, he always was the Valhalla to Percy's Morgan Of The Faeries, and it's reflected in the Zeppelin songs he's chosen to perform in his version of history – "In My Time Of Dying", "Over The Hills And Far Away", "Custard Pie" and its second cousin, "Train Kept A-Rollin'" – mid-period Zeppelin, songs as hard as nails and with a similar Neanderthal release as they're driven.

Between Madison Square and Hammersmith Odeon, Jimmy Page has somehow learnt how to play guitar again. All he needs now is something decent to play and someone decent to play with.

This, of course, precludes singer John Miles poncing like a Dalek with the lid left off. The answer seems obvious. Page, like Plant, puts the biggest smile on his and his audience's face when he's playing Zeppelin songs.

You know the bit towards the end of "In My Time Of Dying", where Bonzo kicks the studio door down and Page soars off into that menacing slide/riff/bottleneck/solo. The one with the millions of overdubs. Well they're not overdubs. He did it note for note and then some. I just laughed. His brain might be gone but his fingers, most definitely, are still there.

This was a tour de force of every style Page has trademarked and then had ripped off from him. The grungy knocking-shop sound, the funky, duck-walking stuff, the granite-hard riffing, the eerie violin bowing and the bursting-at-the-seams clusters of a-million-miles-an-hour notes.

The old codger played his heart and soul out. *Mat Smith*

STEVE RICHARDS / REX FEATURES, MICHAEL BRITO / ALAMY

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"Wholly unrestrained": (l–r) Shane Embury, Mick Harris, Lee Dorrian and Bill Steer of Napalm Death

ALBUMS REVIEW 1988

ALBUMS

Napalm Death From Enslavement To Obliteration EARACHE

Expecting a damn good thrashing, I stuck a couple of stiff books down the back of my trousers for protection and readied myself. It didn't help at all.

After a single play of *From Enslavement To Obliteration* every inch of my hide is raw; every bodily hair that could fall out, has done so. It's a harrowing experience, but it's no good ignoring it. There's a whole new wave of "punks" across the country who are being weaned on speed thrash – growing up to the prospect of deafness at 30, rigor mortis at 40 and a decent clerical job by the time they retire.

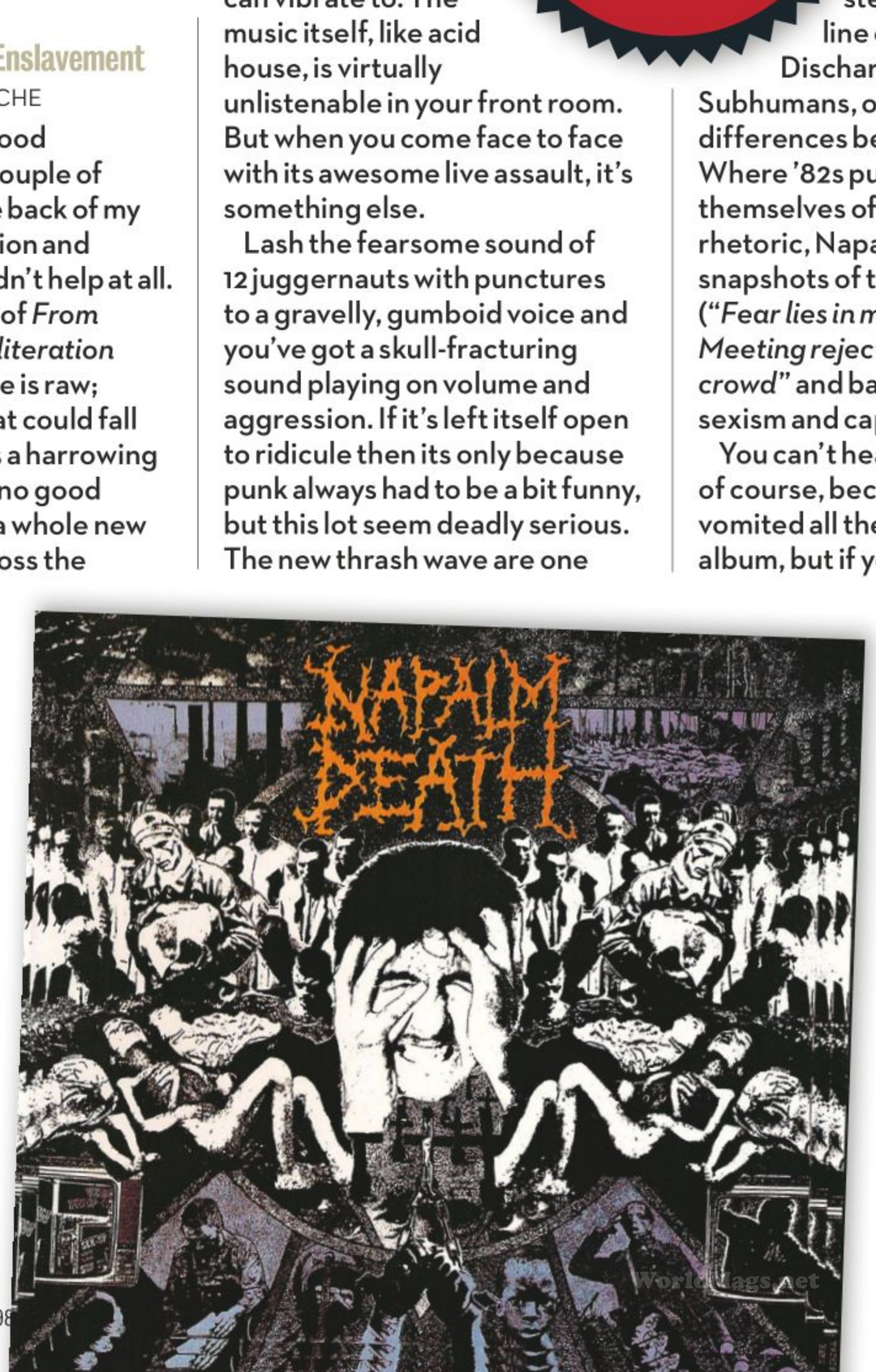
And its bands like Napalm Death, Brit leaders of thrash, who are giving them exactly what they want – a feeling. Something they can vibrate to. The music itself, like acid house, is virtually unlistenable in your front room. But when you come face to face with its awesome live assault, it's something else.

Lash the fearsome sound of 12 juggernauts with punctures to a gravelly, gumboid voice and you've got a skull-fracturing sound playing on volume and aggression. If it's left itself open to ridicule then its only because punk always had to be a bit funny, but this lot seem deadly serious. The new thrash wave are one step down Darwin's line of species from Discharge and The Subhumans, one of the main differences being in the lyrics. Where '82s punk bands purged themselves of anti-government rhetoric, Napalm Death capture snapshots of their own insecurity ("*Fear lies in my openness/ Meeting rejection from the crowd*" and base disgust with sexism and capitalism).

You can't hear a bloody word, of course, because someone's vomited all the way through the album, but if you're concerned, you can read the lyrics, thoughtfully splashed across the inside of the gatefold sleeve.

And if you don't want to read them, there's reams of "Thanks to..." lines from the band. If everybody mentioned on the sleeve buys the LP it'll be gold by Christmas. *From Enslavement To Obliteration* will keep these people cavorting for months, taking up from where the band's *Scum* debut left off (thoughtfully included on the new CD, plus four bonus tracks) with ferocious tracks like "Retreat To Nowhere", "Mentally Murdered" and "Private Death'. The Napalms are more eloquent than many of their contemporaries, but more importantly they are more convincing. Completely over the top, without stops; wholly unrestrained and ugly. (7)

Steve Lamacq, NME Nov 26



TONY MOTTRAM / GETTY

Keith Richards Talk Is Cheap VIRGIN

More than six years after the Rolling Stones last played Britain, my strongest memory of the tour is the sight of Keith Richards swigging Jack Daniel's from any one of *four* bottles strategically placed about the stage.

It's the same with almost everyone. When they talk about Keef it's invariably an anecdote linked to the romantic notion of self-destruction and bugger all to do with the fact that he's a great guitarist.

In the professional hobo stakes, Richards is the pioneer and the likes of Tom Waits, Shane MacGowan et al are mere pretenders to the throne. Well, Keith is back, in the spotlight and still nobody's going to be that concerned about the music he's making, partly because there is a wealth of other things to touch upon that make good copy and conversation and partly because the music is fairly dull and unadventurous.

He is still capable of great things, and the infrequent sparks of inspiration on recent Stones records have all been courtesy of Keith, but there's nothing here to suggest the album was made by a veritable rock legend.

Talk Is Cheap is essentially one big cliche; the title, the sleeve photographs and almost everything in-between.

WorldMags.net

My Bloody Valentine, November 1988: (l–r) Kevin Shields, Deb Googe, Bilinda Butcher and Colm O'Ciosoig

SINGLES REVIEW 1988

SINGLES

My Bloody Valentine
Feed Me With Your Kiss
CREATION

The new My Bloody Valentine EP is the perfect summary of everything thrilling about both "rock" and "pop" in 1988. Scintillating with homages to the past and homicide of the future, it is extraordinarily vibrant and wasted. This is not the same group that once lived in Berlin and were "smelly". Neither is it the same group that once used to support The Primitives and relied entirely upon Colm's daffy drum rolls, this is the group who have got it right now on every count more than any other. It's astonishing. It's an inward blossoming. It's painfully hot orgasms all over the place, if you must know. And you must.

If you want description, the first track scorches and weeps. So does "I Believe". So does "Emptiness Inside", the first 15 seconds of which are coronary-inducing. So, in a cooler, dryer way, does "I Need No Trust". The voices and guitars and drums are doing different things every time you let them break down your door and glide to your bedroom. Kevin and Bilinda's vocal duet on "Feed Me..." is more simpatico than Gaye and Terrell. My Bloody Valentine are easily the most all-encompassing and yet distinctive sound of our times. You should kiss the feet of the *Melody Maker* editorial staff for having the vision and gall to put this band on its cover and then you should rip up your garden or squat floor and send it to the Valentines by carrier dove or Zebra Express. "Feed Me With Your Kiss", all of it, is the best British creation since Horatio Nelson's right hand or Thomas Chatterton's forgeries. Forget the rest – this is as close to love and sex and death as it gets. Group of the moment. Record of the second half of the decade. Fact. Fantasy. You need it. Gorgeous. *MM Oct 29*

INXS Need You Tonight
PHONOGRAM

A promisingly enigmatic, mellifluous first few seconds, the producer's signature almost, then – thump! – the drums and slump! – the voice. A very large musical porch for a very small temple, in this case the small, throbbing temple of Michael Hutchence. "Need You Tonight" is a tasteful absorption of funk that unhelpfully dries out all the wet, sassy elements. I'm sure these guys listen to nothing but old soul compilations, and they're desperately trying to say so here, but so incapable are they of turning it that this might as well be white, mid-'70s rock, which is the sad, natural state to which it reverts in the end. *MM Nov 5*

Prince
I Wish U Heaven PAISLEY PARK

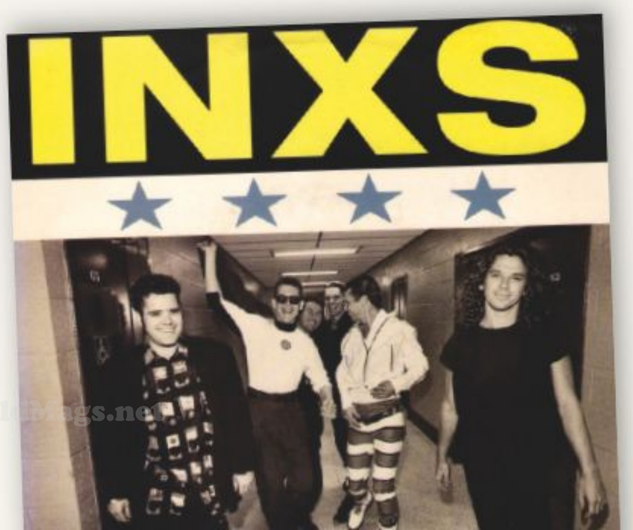
Prince, I get the impression, would fuck mud if it'd move a little and not argue. The B-side of this harmless *Lovesexy* cut is billed as "Scarlet Pussy" by Camille. Yes, well, surely this is the mind of a major talent at work. "Heaven" is reasonably light-fingered but I don't think the old tart can tell me anything about Paradise that Smokey Robinson hasn't already whispered infinitely more gracefully. Ludicrously overrated trouper. *MM Oct 29*

Felt Space Blues CREATION

Lawrence, something of a chameleon (its tummy, perhaps), is now crooning wearily of how he "*wants to be like you*". Babyface sings the Baloos. Talking of *The Jungle Book*, Lawrence once came to a party where I used to live and told us, panic-stricken, that the back yard was on fire. This was shortly after he'd been discussing sexually transmitted diseases with young Wilde, as I recall. I remember it well. The backyard. But it wasn't on fire. Sometimes one worries about Lawrence. Not today, though. This is his most together and accessible missive in some time. A pity, then, it's so vapid. But any man obsessed with Barcelona is a sort of hero in my book. *MM Oct 29*

Happy Mondays
Wrote For Luck FACTORY

I find it problematical to fall for Mancunians who as often as not use very rude words in their glamour-free song titles. And why do all northerners, my rootless self excluded, want to be black and skinheads simultaneously? Yobbos are never cool. Somebody should enlighten them. Edwina Currie, perhaps. Now there's a lady. This self-consciously "alternative" song is not about her as far as I know. It does, though, work up to a near-blistering hypno-rhythm, and I'm tempted to say it's their least irritating slab of greyness to date. I'd dance to it if nobody was looking. On reflection, it's rather saucy. I'd dance to it at the next editorial meeting for, say, £320 plus expenses and a bacon roll. Single of the hour. *MM Oct 29*



RICHARD BELLIA

Confronted with songs like "Struggle", "Whip It Up" and "Take It So Hard", it's obvious what's going on. Richards has strung together a few easy-to-remember phrases, knocked out a few hard-to-forget run-of-the-mill riffs and – hey presto! – we've got us an LP.

Even a cynic like my good self can find something to shout about, and Keith's tongue is firmly in cheek on the rockabilly workout of "I Could Have Stood You Up". He doesn't sound like he's trying too hard. It's off-the-cuff, spontaneous stuff and all the better for it.

Keith Richards should be cherished. The skeleton with skin on is a national institution, part of our musical heritage. But he should be admired from afar and kept away from recording studios. Talk is cheap, and this album is almost as worthless. (3) *Terry Staunton, NME Oct 8*

Fugazi Fugazi DISCHORD

The world of American punk is a notoriously patchy one. Up to your necks in garbage one minute, surrounded by jewels the next, there is rarely a dead-cert bet for brilliance. So even with the promise of former Minor Threat man Ian MacKaye, Fugazi arrive in a splash of uncertainty. Here he teams up with members of lesser-known outfits Rites Of Spring and Pitbull, and the revelation is clear. He's back with the most passionate, potent material he's been involved with since Threat's early ruthless hardcore offerings.

Fluent American vocals wrap the perspiring punk sound in a cloak of angry colour – the lyrics excellent scripts of self-analysis. From the edgy sound of "Burning" ("*What is burning in my eyes?*") to the hopeless case of "Glueman" ("*He holds his home in his hand*"), the music dictates the brittle moods and the vocals, with their US tang, enunciate the feelings.

"Suggestion" and its tricky guitar work is an animated film of backstreet suffocation, a focus on people drowning in lacklustre lives. But most impressive of all is the opening "Waiting Room", stabbed into action by the bass guitar before breaking into a fierce shout for attention, a plea for quality of life. (8) *Steve Lamacq, NME Nov 26*

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"Something more immediate"

U2 are in the eye of the storm, the world's most influential stars. Rather than resting on laurels, they're releasing a "Polaroid" album and keeping moving. "That's the first thing I've learned from Prince," says Bono. "Just get the record out and fuck off."

— MM OCTOBER 22 —

"I'M GOING TO destroy the whole fuckin' myth, the U2 godhead."

Bono adjusts his pillbox hat and stares around the empty car park. Outside the gates, worshippers from Ireland, Italy, the US and Australia are surrounding the U2 management office, spraying fresh graffiti over last year's aerosol paeans of devotion.

Waiting for a sign. Record shops in Dublin opened at midnight last Sunday in an effort to stop crowds from having to sleep on the pavement just to purchase a copy of the new U2 album. Outside Dublin, the entire population of Mediaworld is begging for an audience with the man. And the man? Bono keeps staring around an empty car park.

"It's very… difficult at the moment. I don't know. If I talk for too long now, I'll say something I'll regret." He shakes his head and his pillbox tilts off its axis.

Everyone wants to know Bono; or more accurately, everyone else to know they know Bono. Most carry the same pocketful of missed conceptions: Bono the healer of lepers, Bono the man to swing elections, Bono the social conscience of rock, Bono the viceless Pope Of Pop, Bono the invincible star. »

TERRY O'NEILL / GETTY

"This album, to be honest, is just treading water," says The Edge (seen here in Los Angeles with Bono) of *Rattle And Hum*, U2's sixth studio LP/rockumentary soundtrack

WorldMags.net

"I remember what you said in your last piece, 'Bono will remain a star as long as he doesn't become a celebrity.' It's so true," he says. "Even Charlie Sheen had an imaginary conversation with me. He went on this TV show telling everyone he'd met me. He said, 'I was wasted on booze and I asked Bono, "How do you do it? How?" And Bono turned to me, pointed at the bottle and said, "You won't find it in there."' Can you believe that! It was the last date of The Joshua Tree Tour last year, and I'd already drunk the whole bottle. I couldn't even speak, let alone preach. It's incredible. Everything gets twisted."

Bono is standing in an empty car park in Dublin. Smiling.

"It's important that I keep things together – family, the band. But it's not easy sometimes. Every fucking thing I say becomes some sort of statement, something of vast importance. I could go on stage, unzip my pants and hang my dick out on stage and people would think it was some statement about something."

He looks genuinely amazed. He also looks pretty amazing.

IT WOULD BE so ridiculously easy for Bono to wander off the reservation and never return. The perfect rock (soap) opera: the spokesman for our degeneration who cared too much, became too popular, and still carried the weight of the world on his shoulder pads, spirals into a nervous breakdown – all because of the public's carnivorous appetite for idols. How neat and tidy. Drama fans are counting the days. Luckily for Bono, the rest of U2 refuse to allow him to play out the final scenes.

Edge: "He has his moments. As a character he's a little strange. We hold it together because we look after one another. If Bono gets too freaked out, there's always someone there to tell him to get it together."

There have been numerous comparisons made between Bono and the late John Lennon, but in fact he reminds me of Joe Strummer (although both will loathe the comparison). Just as Strummer led the charge for political consciousness in the late '70s, so Bono continues as a more open-handed humanitarian struggle in the late '80s. Both have been heralded as messiahs of rock just because they shouted questions from the back of class. But they studied their questions so carefully that by the time they reached the front of the class, they had no answers. The more they knew, the more they knew there was more to know.

At different times, both have sat in the bath and screamed, "I don't know!" That's OK. But when Strummer came out of the water closet and pronounced his uncertainty, his public called for his gizzards, so humiliated were they by such a naked display of agnosticism. Bono can be anything, but he must be certain. So he and Strummer both sigh, smile, grab a burger, tell another story and down a jar or two. Everything's OK again. There's always hope.

Adam: "Bono can go pretty far out there. It's not as simple as sex, drugs and rock'n'roll. You can lose your mind very easily under the pressure he's under sometimes."

I know how he feels. My Disney watch says the little hand is on Dumbo's trunk and the big hand is at Mickey Mouse's elbow. It's a nerve-wracking Olympic sprint. Bono is about to vaporise, and as soon as that big hand tickles Mickey's shoulder, The Edge and Adam Clayton will disappear into the studio void to record the B-side for "When Love Comes To Town", the follow-up single to the raucous "Desire", and I'll be left up shit creek without an interview.

U2 is a small word, but as soon as it's mentioned, huge numbers start to crunch. Since 1980, they've sold well over 30 million albums and have been No 1 in almost every marketplace in the world, usually simultaneously. *The Joshua Tree* alone sold over 11 million copies, while last year's global tour grossed over £23 million. They are, without doubt, the biggest band of the decade. It's all figures. And it all figures. The new double album, *Rattle And Hum*, is an attempt by the world's biggest rock band to become the world's biggest rock'n'roll band. The usual thesaurus of epic adjectives used to describe the U2 sound have been shunted to the sidings. At the end of last year I asked Adam where U2 could go after *The Joshua Tree*, the LP now hailed as "the album of the decade", and the tour that played to over three million people in 15 countries. Adam's reply was simple, if inevitable: "Downwards".

Rattle And Hum is not only the soundtrack to their forthcoming live film. It's almost a deliberate bid to sabotage their position on the summit of the rock mountain, to undermine the U2 myth. If *The Joshua Tree* was, to use Bono's phrase, "the big picture", then *Rattle And Hum* is a slice of hurried graffiti, closing Chapter II of their mammoth saga in the same way that *Under A Blood Red Sky* ended the first chapter.

The Edge is sitting in their favourite cosy docker's pub. Smiling.

"This album, to be honest, is just treading water," he says. "I mean, I like the songs, but it's only a fraction of what we can do. It's like a little Polaroid of U2."

Adam: "What we could have done, is not put out this record and waited another year and a half, and that would have been the end of what we are now. We wanted something more immediate."

Bono is still in the car park. Staring.

"That's the first thing I've learned from Prince. Just get the record out and fuck off."

And because it's only a film soundtrack, U2 don't have to compete with past triumphs.

Edge: "It's true. We never really thought about it like that, but you're right."

Bono: "We're going to keep releasing record after record until everyone'll be sick of U2."

In an age where everyone is striving to create the ultimate out-of-body experience, the surrender or drowning of the self in lustrous discord, U2 are trying to cram the human back into the song.

While most *Maker* cover stars try to lose themselves in their music, U2 are trying to find themselves. Sweeping artifice under the carpet, they quest for some kind of gungy, tactile reality. They now seem determined to exhibit their frailty, their vulnerability: "We're the biggest band in the world and we can get it wrong and it doesn't matter. It's thrilling."

Adam: "That's what rock'n'roll is. I mean, rock bands don't make mistakes. It's about playing the songs and not being too precious about them. Rock'n'roll isn't something you can just buy in a record shop. It's an attitude."

Bono: "What other band in our position would learn the chords of 'All Along The Watchtower' five minutes before they went on stage, play it live and record it? No one."

No one. The Edge stops smiling.

"I don't think it was a deliberate attempt to do anything other than record songs as straightforwardly and with as much feeling as possible. It was the music we were listening to at the time. It's as simple as that really, right from "Desire" to "Love Rescue Me". I think people can put a whole heap of significance on something that's incredibly straightforward and unpretentious."

Uh hum. For a pick-up truck without a destination, every road is the right road. Yet the "real" music they're out to lasso must reveal scars, and up until now U2 have hidden their pain carefully under a cumulus of all-consuming power and passion.

"But there's pain in doubt," offers Adam.

Edge: "From the beginning, most U2 songs have been riddled with doubt. That's the thing about faith. Faith is meaningless without the doubt. Without doubt, there is no faith."

Adam: "You always have to ask questions. Part of the problem with music today is that people are too fucking afraid to ask questions."

Edge: "This band is full of contradictions. The song 'God Part II' is really Bono trying to express his own internal feelings of conflict."

Bono sings lines like: "*I don't believe rock'n'roll can really change the world*", yet Bono is one of the few people who really does believe. He has

U2 at the disused Point Depot in Dublin's docklands, May 1988. Performances of "Desire" and "Van Diemen's Land" are filmed there shortly before the building is converted to an events venue

faith in the recuperative powers of his music; where there's a riff there's a way.

"Of course I do, but not all the time. That's the point, you see."

He also sings, "*You glorify your past when the future dries up.*" Yet most of the nine studio songs on the album paddle in other artists' pools, and employing the likes of Dylan, BB King and Billy Preston merely muddies the water. Conflict indeed, although two tracks still send a shiver down the thigh bone. The cover and the song lyrics contain a lexicography of legends, from Billie Holiday, through Elvis, Hendrix, Lennon and Dylan (once again there's similarities with The Clash's *London Calling* album, which was also littered with icons of mythical Americana).

It's not U2 trying to become legends by association, more an escape from fame's quarantine. It's lonely. They're scraping the scales off pop's cistern. Scales that should have been flushed. Dylan has written one decent song this decade (and "Brownsville Girl" was co-written by Sam Shepard). He's not exactly the inspired genius that will wave wands and turn masturbation into a masterpiece.

Only Van Dyke Parks' string orchestration on the disturbing "All I Want Is You" adds to the flavour a stew simmered smack in the centre of the American heartland.

Adam: "The reason we feel comfortable in the company of Dylan, BB King or Keith Richards is not because they're legends, but because they're alive through having music in their soul. Dylan still has it. You know it when you meet him.

"It's not because we want their name on our record. When we get to where they are, we want to be as much in love with music."

> "Every fucking thing I say becomes some sort of statement"

U2 ARE SURROUNDED by perpetual chatter: whirring cameras, curious star-spotters, jostling fans and ear-bleeding demands. Perhaps the only way the band can preserve their marbles is to make a louder noise, an impromptu racket to drown out the babble of fame. Bono may not be able to stop questioning his motives and actions, but at least he can blot them out occasionally with rampant noise – rock'n'roll as refuge from thought.

We need idols to aspire to because it proves that dreams can come true. Bono is living proof that anyone can be anything. But if you're part of everyone else's dream, how do you keep a perspective on your own reality?

Adam: "There's something inside me that's now able to say no. I never could do that before. You start to realise how you want to live and ignore things like the LA bullshit. Who wants to look like a fuckin eedjit? I have better things to do with my time. You hold onto your family. They're the people who will get you through it."

"I don't know, I think drugs sound pretty interesting too." The Edge is still smiling.

"A nod's as good as a wink, eh Edge?" Adam waits for a reaction.

Edge adjusts his straw hat. Pop. Another myth bursts. Ho hum.

Most of the icons U2 now embrace have all achieved success through excess. They touched the extremities because that's what their characters demanded – the *Citizen Kane* syndrome. The strengths that forced them to become adored statues were also the weaknesses that toppled the totem.

Adam: "A lot of the people that say they created stuff when they were out of their brains probably weren't. That's the truth. The minute they finished the record they were. If you're feeling that awful and that fucked up, you don't work. We work because we're fucked up."

Edge: "We formed this band so that we could play and write music. Which, now that I think about it, is a pretty fuckin' stupid idea. Most people form bands because they want to get laid, which is reasonable. Our idea is unfashionable, but there you have it."

Adam: "Our lives incorporate some of the same extremes as Hendrix and Lennon. Like how do you balance the work you do with your private life, and how do you deal with the rest of the world? You can get pretty strung out when you're on the road for three months."

So U2 aren't the much-vaunted anchor of moderation? »

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Bono on LA's Sunset Boulevard during a publicity shoot for the *Rattle And Hum* album, 1988

Adam: "If you've ever seen the look in Bono's eyes in the middle of a show three months into a tour, it doesn't feel stable at all! All this celebrity bullshit that you get when all you want to do is play fucking music. How do you deal with that?"

How do you deal with that?

Adam stares at an empty pint glass.

"We drink a lot."

What are you most frightened of?

Edge: "I never worry about writing better songs than we've written already. My fear is that people will find out that we're basically charlatans."

Ho hum.

For the heroes U2 cherish, rock'n'roll without sex or seduction would be as fulfilling as rice pudding without raspberry jam (Jimi's favourite). Yet even U2 at their most rock'n'roll are virtually sexless. They have substituted sex and sensuality for celebration and elation. Hearing "Pride" live can make you *go*, but can't make you *come*.

Adam: "No, no, we need it occasionally too! I think you misunderstand how much sex there is on the record. There's a lot there, and sex is a very difficult thing to keep together."

Edge: "I think there's a very honest sexuality about the record, which I find more interesting than a blatant *Spinal Tap*-type thing. The subtle sexuality of gospel music is what attracts me. It's strange and twisted, because that's far more what it's all about."

Surely people don't go to U2 concerts to get turned on. They go to feel a part of something, to hum to the chorus, to stroll peacefully through the medium wave, feel their ribcage heave and sporadically have their conscience twinged. They go to share in a communion where all faces are equal.

Adam: "No! It's all the same thing. Spirituality and sex are so close. If you try and have sex without spirituality, it's not sex."

Isn't that just the difference between a fuck and making love? One is an exhausting one-night stand, the other an inexhaustible union.

Adam: "You have to be able to do both or else it's not a good fuck. That's what we saw in that roots music. The prim-and-proper people call it gospel, but the people who know what it's about call it sex music, because that's what it is."

If you're thinking of reaching for that brown-paper airline bag by the settee, remember that U2 are not the only people to find a chord binding carnal pleasure and celestial promise. *Lovesexy* is Prince's nickname for God. And what well-bred thigh-stroker could act without the Reverend Al Green spinning in the bedroom? You take my point.

WITH OR WITHOUT his dick on display, Bono's stardom allows him to lambast TV evangelists in "Bullet The Blue Sky", the South African regime in "Silver And Gold", and a host of other noble targets. But he also knows that this very same stardom reinforces the injustice he abhors. Idols are a testament to the fact that the system works. Small wonder that Bono's hat is off-kilter. It's not easy being Bono.

No other band benefited so much from the exposure of Live Aid, yet U2 themselves were apparently so unhappy with their performance or the reasons behind it, they came within an inch of parting company. It was supposedly Adam that pulled the band back from the precipice by demanding they record *The Joshua Tree* first and split later.

"We split up last week, but I think we're back together again," The Edge says, evaporating the suggestion while Adam rummages around for a gag.

"We always split up at closing time, but reform at four the next day."

Edge: "I must admit that we've been getting on much better recently. It used to be tougher. There used to be rows about everything. I think it's much easier being a big group, because it allows you more freedom. It was much harder making our first few albums."

The collisions may have become less ferocious, but the band still compete with one another.

Edge: "Actually, deep, deep down, we're all very shallow people. Ask me a question, Adam. I'll answer it honestly… and lie."

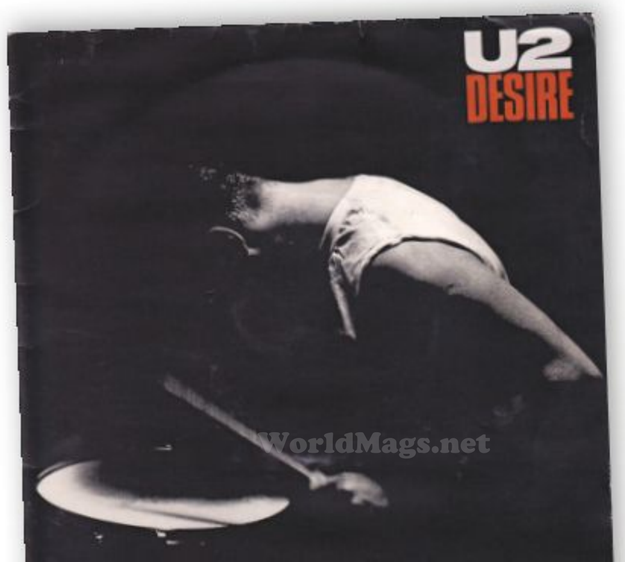
Are you as well hung as you lead us to believe?

Edge: "Of course. It's the only thing Eno and I have in common."

The guitarist turns to embarrass his partner in crime: "When are you going to start writing again?"

Adam huff and puffs, adjusts his cap and orders another drink. Although U2 share the songwriting credits, this time Bono has written all the lyrics. Except for the two cover versions, "…Watchtower" and The Beatles' single jewel, "Helter Skelter".

The Edge says it's the only Beatles song all four band members like. It's sloppy, turgid, all fluster and bluster, but that doesn't matter. For Bono, "It had to



TERRY O'NEILL / GETTY

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be there. Of course it was a deliberate." Bono deals in ideals. It's the meaning of the song that mattered, not the means of delivering it. Yet here in Marshall McLuhan's global village, the medium is still the message. Unless, of course, your humanness is awesomely gruesome (or gruesomely awesome) enough to jam that medium. Last year U2 performed a live version of "Help" to prove just that. When I told Bono it was crap, he smiled and said, "Probably, but it's the idea of it being there that's important."

Edge: "Bono's always been into John Lennon and always liked 'Help', because he thought that at that moment in their career it was the most honest statement to make. The reason it's not on the album is because it *was* a crap version in the end. Well, not crap, but you had to be there to enjoy it.

"That's the thing about this album. It's just a collection of moments that we thought had something good about them, like "Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking For" [complete with gospel choirs]. We never, ever did that before or since. We were in New York, we were sent a cassette of this gospel choir, so we went along to their church, spent an hour rehearsing, it seemed OK, so we did it on stage that night and it's on the album. None of it's been touched up, it's literally just there.

"We had to decide what was worthy of being a live album that somebody was going to pay 10 quid for, and not just putting out the standard greatest hits and trading off the fact that people know and like these songs and producing the usual boring record. Who wants a live version of 'With Or Without You' anyway? On record it would have been a big 'so what?'.

"What we did with this album, we had about a dozen shows recorded, including a couple of off-the-wall shows like the Save The Yuppie Concert in San Francisco, and we thought, 'Right, what are we going to do, what's this album going to be about?' The criteria for this album was: 'Does it feel good?'"

The band's musical isolation has been cited as the main reason why U2 have now adopted roots in American rock'n'roll. When in doubt, reach for the ethnic motherlode. Nowadays it's like *Gardeners' World*. The Waterboys' Mike Scott and Elvis Costello have both moved out of London to plant roots in Dublin, while Dublin's most famous sons have seemingly found roots in Sun Studios, Memphis.

Adam: "I think the journey starts here in Dublin, with what we have in our traditional music. We hear immigration songs and songs of exploitation within Irish culture, the same as went to America via the plantation supervisors who were Irish, and then it mixed with the black blues and gospel music. It's not adopting. It is a part of us. That's really what this album is about. A return to simplicity."

Why steps backwards? Why *return* anywhere?

"Because who wants to play stadiums for the rest of their life? We really want to play a gig at the Marquee. That's really what it all comes down to, just enjoying playing in the band and seeing things happen when we come together. That's what's important. Not stadiums and lighting rigs and zooming around the country."

When U2 formed, they wanted to be the biggest band in the world. Having hit the target, they now want to be a garage band. Just like fame: people spend their life craving attention. When they get it, they spend the rest of their lives wearing sunglasses and avoiding recognition. U2 wear wigs, too. Ironic, really.

Edge: "That's the irony of life. There's no way round it."

THEY'VE ALREADY HAD two singles at No 1 in the States, but the band are still pleasantly surprised the free-falling "Desire" straddled the top of the British charts. Very surprised.

Edge: "It's actually not a bad single to have at No 1, because it's so uncompromisingly rock'n'roll and nothing to do with what's going on in the charts at the moment."

Adam: "If we were an unknown band and had put out that song, it wouldn't have been played on the radio. We're just so bored with what's going on. There's nobody saying anything and there's no one playing loud guitar. There's no personality."

Edge: "As a big group, we feel it's our responsibility to fuck up the charts as much as possible. I'm finding it very difficult to find music that I can listen to at the moment. I don't like anything in the charts, so for me, at the moment, there's only the old stuff to listen to."

What about all the new bands sparking tiny eruptions?

Adam: "We can't really comment on what's happening down there. We can only see what's happening in our particular world."

I give them a copy of The Young Gods' *L'Amourir* and feel like a Zulu offering the Queen Mum a gilt-edge pair of antelope antlers.

U2 are out of reach. Inevitably, they are also out of touch. Their currency in the "give it to me NOW" market may have devalued, but no one can strike them off the bliss agenda yet. They're far too dogmatic in their pursuit of wayward spirits to keep trying to bridge the culture gap between '58 and '88.

Adam: "But it was always like that. Even in '76, we never had access to what was going on. We never had access to the latest punk releases in London. We've always lived in this strange world where things get to us eventually."

Edge: "It's said that rock'n'roll died in 1959, and there's something to that. I think the music we tend to go back to all the time is something very fragile and hard to pin down. It's in the early Elvis records, it's in some country records, in The Band. You find it in obscure bands in New Orleans and places like that. You'll never hear it on the radio. I couldn't even begin to explain what exactly it is, but I know that people like T-Bone Burnett and even Dylan spent their life finding this music. We're just getting a feel for it now."

> "I don't like anything in the charts, so there's only the old stuff"

Adam: "It's freedom. That's what it is."

The band have spent most of this year in LA, editing their film and writing some of their studio tracks. Somehow LA, the capital of conflicting extremes, seems a natural resting place for U2.

Bono: "LA is strange. As long as you think it is strange, then you're alright. I think it's strange, and I'm pretty damn strange too!"

Ain't that the truth. The more I meet Bono the more I like him, and the more I like him the stranger he becomes. The odd man out, even in a car park. Bono has moments of sparkling brilliance. He also has moments of utter idiocy. His great virtue is that he seldom can tell one from the other.

The Edge is still laughing in LA (so to speak).

"We don't really belong anywhere. I really enjoyed being there for six months, because for me it was like being there live. It's the fringe of what's going on in the west and the most extreme example of where the world is going."

Yet even in the heart of Tinseltown, Bono and co searched for the grubbier side of life, believing that "everyone has a story to tell", but you have to get your fingernails dirty to find the truth. Not just any truth, but some unifying truth that will order and justify all the foolishness that surrounds them. For Bono, the key is still love. And why not? It opens most back doors. U2's quest for the truth is absurd, but that's alright by me. Most trust lies in absurdity.

Edge: "To write a song, you have to know about people. Some of the most interesting people I met in LA were doormen or street bums. That's one of the great things about Bono. He really understands and is interested. No matter how big or successful he gets, he'll always be fascinated… especially by women, but we won't get into that now."

Adam: "He looks for truth in everything.

And *that's* the truth. It only remains to be seen whether the U2 myth is stronger than the men who created it. I hear pops in abundance and wait for the explosion.

Adam: "Perhaps some of that will come over in the film."

Ah yes, the film. But that's another story. *Ted Mico* •

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June 20, 1988: Spacemen 3 on stage at Dingwalls in Camden Lock, North London

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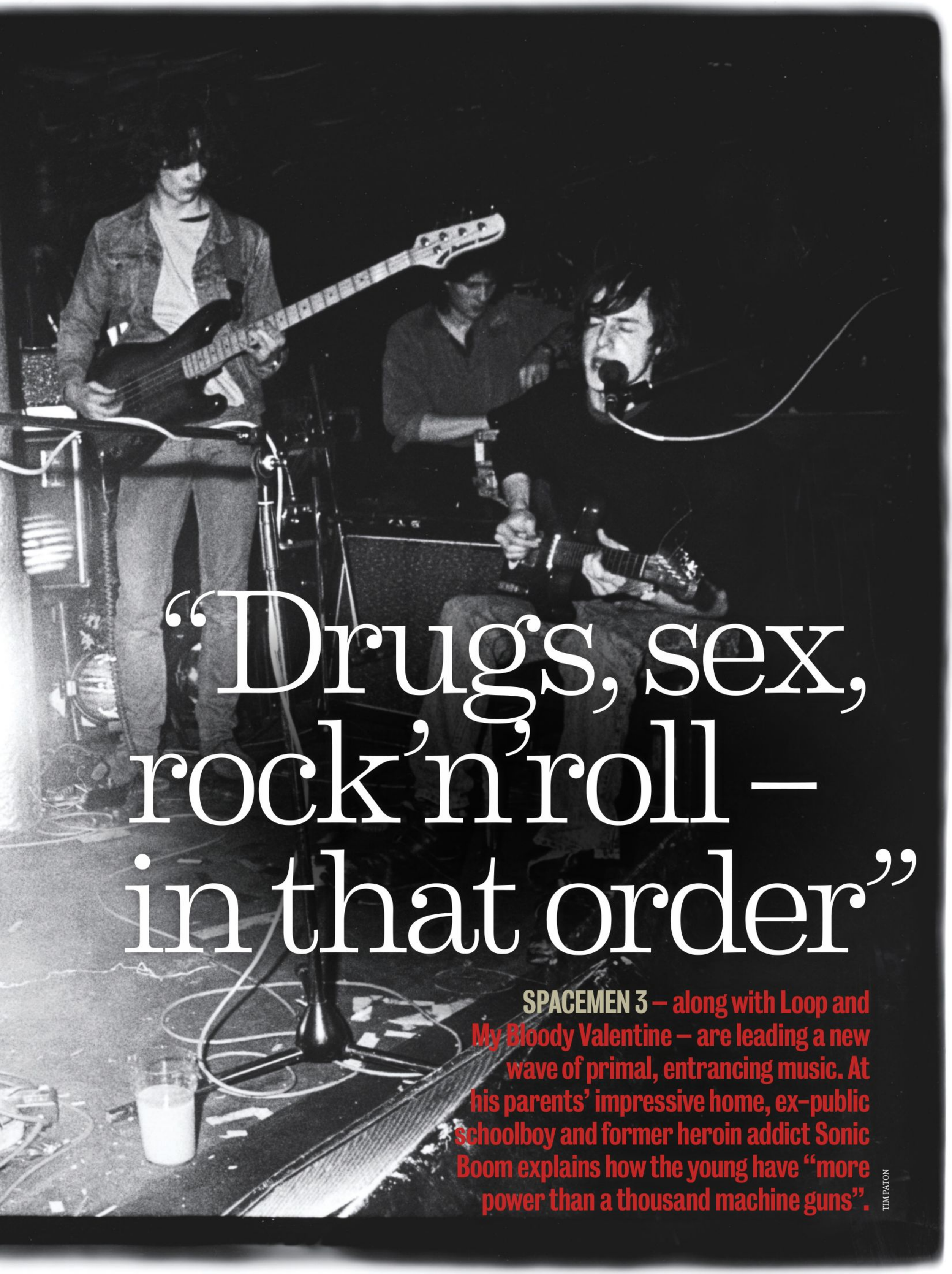

“Drugs, sex, rock’n’roll – in that order”

SPACEMEN 3 – along with Loop and My Bloody Valentine – are leading a new wave of primal, entrancing music. At his parents’ impressive home, ex-public schoolboy and former heroin addict Sonic Boom explains how the young have “more power than a thousand machine guns”.

TIM PATON

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— MELODY MAKER NOVEMBER 19 —

"We may try to persuade ourselves that the complete destruction of communism, or of capitalist imperialism, would also destroy alienation. But an instant of genuine reflection would soon tell us that all such external enemies could disappear from the earth tomorrow and leave us exactly where we were before" *– Northrop Frye, The Modern Century*

"I drive a Rolls-Royce, 'cos it's good for my voice" *– Marc Bolan, Children Of The Revolution*

SONIC BOOM MEETS me at Rugby Station. A brisk autumn afternoon. He drives me to the chemist. On the way, he points out Rugby School. It's big and it's elegant. When we get to the chemist it's shut, so Sonic Boom tells me we'll have to come back later, to pick up his prescription. Ever considerate, I ask him if he's poorly. "Not as such," he says. "I've just got to get my methadone."

Sonic Boom drives me to his parents' house. I could weep, like Rosemary, or Nancy, or Flossie, or whatever her name is, in *The Great Gatsby*. It's on the top shelf, I can't reach it. The one who cried because she'd "never seen such beautiful shirts". I've never seen such a beautiful house. It's undoubtedly Edwardian, or Victorian, or Tudor, or one of those. Sonic Boom says he could be living in some crappy bedsit just outside Rugby, but while his parents are away (unspecified), he might as well live here. I'll tell you one thing about Sonic Boom. He's not stupid.

Sonic Boom, who looks like a cross between Guy Chadwick and Rupert Everett, makes me a cup of tea and moans about Loop, how they've ripped off Spacemen 3, how Josh was the office boy at their record company and constantly expressed his fawning admiration. He quite likes Loop, but he's miffed with Josh for stealing all these ideas, from sound to vision.

Sonic Boom asks me why I suddenly like Spacemen 3 so much when the only time I've reviewed a record of theirs I said it wasn't as wide as Loop and went on about Michelle Pfeiffer and Raymond Carver. I consider explaining that going on about Michelle Pfeiffer and Raymond Carver is one of the highest accolades known to man. Instead I tell him I've heard the new Spacemen 3 single and have seen the light. Spacemen 3's hour has to come at last. Their new single is called "Revolution".

Sonic Boom decides to play me the entire Spacemen 3 back catalogue. Upstairs. We go upstairs. We go to the red room.

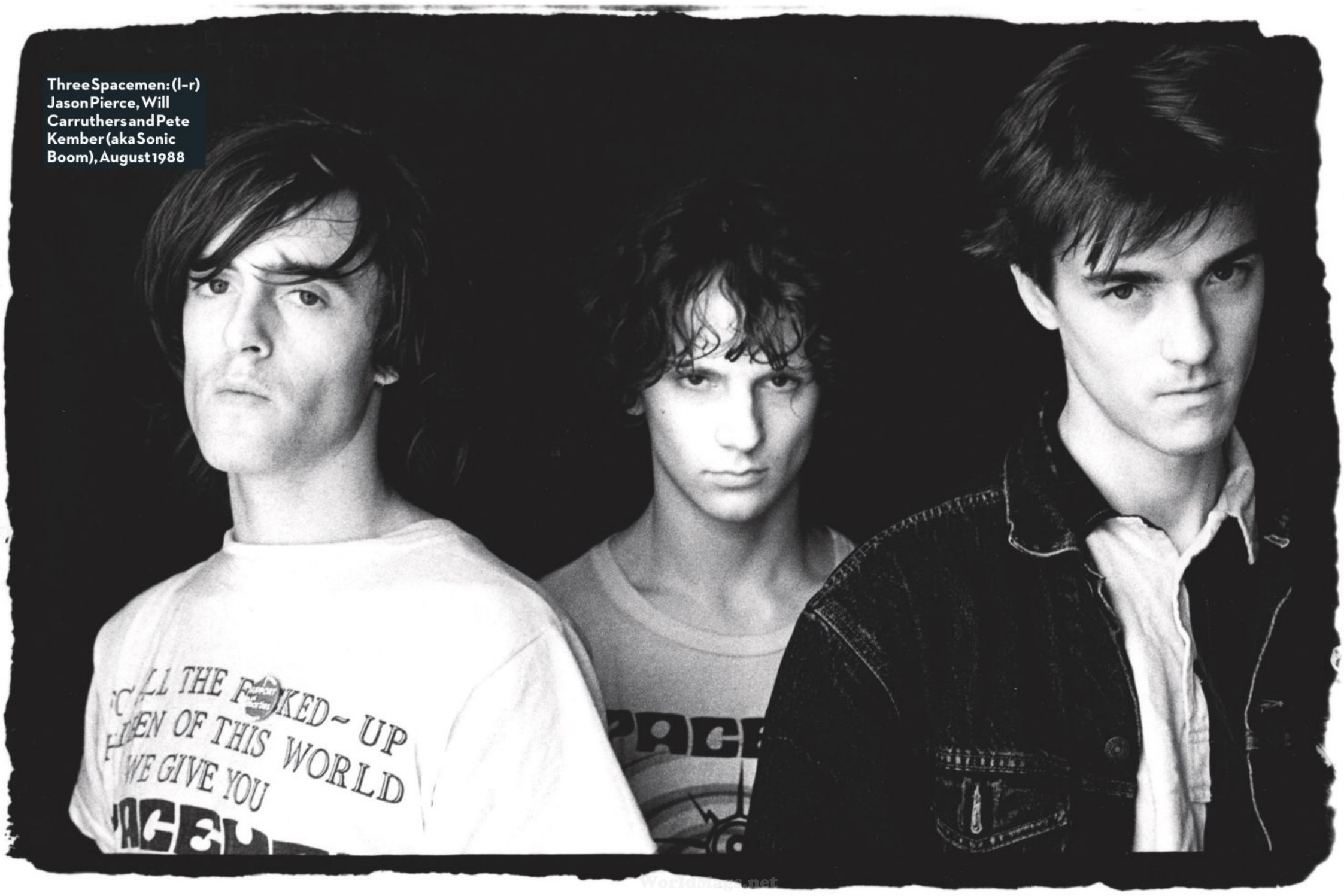
THE RED ROOM is magnificent. Now I begin to wonder if I died on the train this morning. On the walls are exquisitely framed pictures. One is a Velvet Underground poster. One is a Lichtenstein. And one, plum there, right by where I am most assuredly going to be sitting don't-try-to-stop-me, is Andy Warhol's *Marilyn*. Records sprawl everywhere, including every Stooges/MC5/13th Floor Elevators/Suicide bootleg in existence and several more besides. Two lovely electric guitars pout at me. Ashtrays galore. Bung in a few dozen cats and I'd feel right at home.

Sonic Boom puts on the first Spacemen 3 single and indicates we are in for a long session. He rolls a cigarette while I read an American fanzine which tells me Spacemen 3 are obsessed with pyramids and that Sonic Boom is an ex-heroin addict. I can't imagine how we're going to top it. (Later, some days later, I acquire a T-shirt which instantly becomes my favourite. It's one of those saying "For all the fucked-up children of the world, we give you: Spacemen 3".)

The entire Spacemen 3 back catalogue is a many-splendoured thing. From "Walkin' With Jesus" through the ethereal "Transparent Radiation" and the shattering pop rush of "Take Me To The Other Side" to the glistening *Perfect Prescription* album, it displays an admirable single-mindedness.

"'Cos it's very minimal, very simple, very primal – we actually went out of our way to show that four people who couldn't play instruments could make a sound which could be really uplifting, could turn you on. And that anyone can do that."

Increasingly, this is the scion of the times. As Spacemen 3, Loop, My Bloody Valentine, and the soon-to-be-revelatory God, teeter on the brink of a direct noise/repetition/sensuous minimalism breakthrough, setting fire to the heels of such half-hearted gotta-be-home-by-midnight pussycats as The Young Clayface Gods and Sonic Middle-Age Youth, this new record, this one called of all things "Revolution", is as close to an anthem as we can still get, given that everything concrete has been said before. "Rock", waking from a nightmare-fuelled slumber where pop and blondes and pandas and herons genuinely were saying more, doing more, wriggling and shaking and cutting through, could conceivably have been galvanised into – if not action – at least a statement of intent. As black



Three Spacemen: (l–r) Jason Pierce, Will Carruthers and Pete Kember (aka Sonic Boom), August 1988

PHIL NICHOLLS

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music notches up another three-year cycle of whoredom, its latest bunch of sprinters exhausted but rich, a new white noise which understands the complex, curiously simple, beauty of colour and shade lurches coughing into the playroom.

"Revolution" is pure as the driven snow, outspoken but inarticulate, raucous but hazy.

"*I'm so sick… of people telling me what I can and can't do with my life,*" mumbles Sonic Boom over a monstrous monotone fireworks display of electric guitars, "*…and I'm so tired of people who can't off their arses… wait a minute. I smell burning! I see a change coming around the bend. And I suggest to you… that it takes five seconds of decision to realise that the time is right to start thinking about a little revolution…*"

Those are the lyrics. They're not much without the music, actually. Odd syntax, yes, but with the music it's raw power, kaleidoscopic angst, one of the sexiest – in a sort of Joan Of Arc fashion – records of the year. Storm the Bastille, *mes petits enfants*! And all that. It sounds like a record made by young, jaded but seething people. Somehow, it's not crass. Somehow its effect is devastating.

Sonic Boom passes me the cigarette and I go all funny. Why are you all ganging up on me? Why? Marilyn looks content. I want to take my shoes off, but I'm in someone else's house. Spacemen 3's back catalogue sounds great. Spacemen 3's back catalogue sounds fucking fantastic. I think we'd better start the interview before Spacemen 3's back catalogue causes me to, like, let it all hang out, and like, freak out. So, come on, take a little trip with me… Gosh, I'm frightfully sorry, what I mean is – here we go then.

Sonic Boom's name is Pete Kember. I want to know what sort of revolution he wants (though the romantic gesture of calling for one has its own mountainous validity), and if his background has any relevance to it. Sadly, I cannot form sentences any more, so just concentrate very hard now and see if a probing interview doesn't appear before your very eyes, which are as lagoons. All three of them.

"I think it's a classic punk record, yeah. Hopefully people will look at themselves more critically, something the English don't tend to do very much. The English disease is this high opinion of ourselves. We think we've still got the empire out there, that the world owes us a living because we're an island.

"When you do go over to Europe it's such a fantastic place, you wish they'd fucking shunt England along and join it on to it. You can learn a lot more from travelling than you can from school…"

Yes. School. Interesting one this, Pete. A lot of people might be surprised that the voice behind "Revolution" attended Rugby School…

"Many became 'the fucked-up children' because of school. Everyone, when I was there, turned to alcohol. There's this massive pressure on them to perform – they realised that in the present situation they're being groomed to be Members Of Parliament or diplomats, or whatever. But there's a mix. I enjoyed my time there. Boarding got me away from my parents at 13, which was great 'cos I could do more or less what I wanted.

"But I was banned from the school for two years after I left; they thought I'd be a bad influence, living so near to the school and having a record for drugs, etc, being a bad boy. So as a result I've lost contact with nearly all of them. People do tend to be very isolated at Rugby – a lot think they're God's gift to society. There is snobbery, but it's not rife. There are some very aware people there – some were turning out acid on sugarcubes in the science labs in the '60s. Each house up there gets a music paper, you know, they all read the music press, not *Tom Brown's School Days* while they're warming the loo seat for the fagmaster…"

Do you consider yourself privileged? I mean, this house is making me nervous. (No, it's not, it's making me feel very comfortable.)

"I don't speak quite as posh as they all did. That didn't go down too well; I was an oik. But I assume I learned some discipline there – I've always been the one to drive this band on, really. I assume that's from the competitive schooling. The band is my design, and the rest are totally into it. The new members… they're Spacemen, y'know? It takes a certain type of person to be a Spaceman. They're great. This is now the band we always hoped we could be."

Is there a difference between a Spaceman and a fucked-up child of the world?

"The band is my design, and the rest are totally into it"

"Er…"

Sonic Boom chews this one over very carefully. It's one of the best questions I'll manage all day.

"No. Not really. No, it's just … all the people who feel alienated in this world."

We go over this point. We go over a lot of these points. The interview is cyclic. You'll see. Sonic Boom answers all the points you're itching to raise.

I wish I could copy down Howard Barker's wonderful poem *Don't Exaggerate* here. It would explain everything. About that small thing politics and that big thing consciousness. But it's 23 pages long.

I'm tempted.

Oh, get away with you.

Trust the discretion, not the argument.

So, it's me and I'm saying yes yes yes, but what would a revolution entail?

"Ha!" (*Cough*).

Is there any chance of it happening, in your eyes?

"Oh yes. I mean, 'revolution' is kind of a dangerous word…"

An incendiary word, ideally. An inflammatory word.

"It isn't like – today everyone grabs their machine guns and rushes out onto the street and it's the revolution! It's not like that. It happens over a generation – five, 10, 15 years – where people will change things, just as dramatically as they need to be changed."

Change what?

"A lot of laws and rules which are either archaic or just a very badly thought-out joke. The revolution is in people getting together, doing things themselves in different ways in their own medium, to make the world a better place for them and for other people. The present voting system has it as: vote for one side and one half of the people are totally happy and the other half not, and vice versa. But it isn't like that. They agree on very little, whereas their manifestos should overlap. The ideal party would obviously be the best of both…"

But desiring a compromise surely couldn't inspire a revolution?

"Yes! Political systems are changed slowly, it requires impetus and pressure from people. Did you see that Prince Charles programme the other week? He's absolutely right about the buildings. I just fucking wish this country was a monarchy, where the king ruled. I would just so much rather have that. Name me one politician as level-headed and as reasonable as that. They might be wet or mild, but they're usually pig- or bull-headed. It's a freak show!

"And look at the flak he's had for standing up. But by doing it he's roused other people, like myself, to put in our five-penneth-worth. He's so right, y'know?

"I don't know, I fucking hate politics! This is the first political song we've done, I don't intend to turn into a political band. The politics of life maybe."

Sonic Boom is faintly naive to the extent that I know it's not worth my saying, "You do realise 'Fergie's sister's divorce' totally blew away all the publicity Charles might've got for that?" Or saying, "Ever visited Romania? It's horrible. Better Thatcher than Ceausescu any day." Or saying, "Gandhi lacked charisma, did he not?" Or saying, "Wouldn't the world lose a treasure chest of beauty if the Berlin Wall ever came down?"

Then again, it's the young-at-spirit, the faintly naive, who generally do things rather than just think up a thousand watertight reasons not to. I say something like, "Royal family… used as stock-in-trade pill-sweetener… soap-opera tabloids… anaesthetic… no revolution while all is cosy and snug under Di's new hat…"

"Think so? I think they're just a quaint little idea to have. I'm not against them or for them. I wouldn't get rid of them. In my ideal revolution, we wouldn't go and shoot the royal family at all, oh no no no no. They've inherited that money, that position, those houses – that's fine."

I kind of like Charles too, the old ponce. I kind of think "that's fine" too, if only to wind up students. The biggest silent majority of all is the dead. Think about that one for a minute.

Who would you shoot?

"No one. It's not about shooting. The violence is in the thought that needs to happen. Violently strong thinking. I'm not for shooting or hanging, much as I might find certain politicians highly distasteful, »

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clearly Thatcher. But I don't want her shot. We can silence her without shooting her.

"The youth of today has more power than a thousand machine guns. Despite the word 'yuppie', we are a fairly turned-on, switched-on generation. Quite similar to the '60s. More interesting in many ways. We haven't just got Vietnam, we've got lots of wars and odd conflicts. The youth culture's been a lot more varied than the '60s. I'm very happy with this decade…"

At least admit it lacks figureheads, symbols, icons…

"Everything happens again and again, in cycles. They will emerge. They will emerge. The baby's been born and it's growing now at a massive rate. The '90s are gonna be massive, y'know?"

Yeah? How?

"There's just so much room for improvement."

That doesn't guarantee it'll come.

"In the '90s, we can really turn this world into what it should be. Realise that we've peaked and we've gone over the top in destroying forests, pumping shit into the sea. The North Sea and the atmosphere have taken all they're gonna take. Now is the time. The experiment is over. Now we can apply what we've learned."

Please specify. How will we be different by 2000 AD?

"Right. Ideally – there'll be a lot more freedom of thought and speech, which is still quite crassly restricted. You can't print 'fuck' in *Melody Maker*, right?"

Correct. In the same newsagent you can buy a thousand books which do print it, next door there's a cinema where you can hear it 50 times an hour, all around you are people who use it in every sentence, but in *Melody Maker*, often the home of today's most vibrant writing, we are mocked, out genitals nailed to the floor, by asterisks, which as Kurt Vonnegut once pointed out, visually resemble nothing so much as "assholes".

"Yet the last photo of us with the 'fucking' T-shirt was printed there. Stuff like that, little crass things help, y'know? And we've started to realise that the Russians are human beings, and they that we are…"

Yes, I suppose that's nearly as significant…

"The world's becoming a much smaller place all the time, which is fantastic. We can learn so much from other cultures and environments, from looking at the best of everything and applying it to ourselves. There's a lot of potential for a nice smoothly flowing, pleasant-to-inhabit country…"

How much can music involve itself, though?

"Oh, massively."

You're not cynical about that?

"I would say that, to the people who buy our records, we are more influential than Margaret Thatcher."

HEY! GUESS WHAT I've just realised? That this is all pretty irrelevant once you hear Spacemen 3. The way Spacemen 3 sound is wild and free. Debate doesn't come into it. You can lose yourself in Spacemen 3. You can forget everything else. They don't incite; they arrest and then suggest. They remove the shackles of chronology and location.

As Sonic Boom plays me the entire Spacemen 3 back catalogue plus a hyper-secret preview of the new year's surprisingly "mellow" new album *Playing With Fire*, he frequently closes his eyes for a period of time. I wonder whether he'll think I'm rude if I don't.

What experience is most akin to this music's effect?

"You mean like that feeling you get when you're about to fall off a cliff?"

Sorry?

"It's alright, I'm just taking the piss out of Loop. Erm… different drugs, I would say, and love. Well, the key words are Purity, Revolution, Accuracy, Love, Suicide. Most of the feelings we try to sum up are attained through cannabis or amphetamines or whatever. Or that really intense feeling of being close to someone you're totally in love with and who's totally in love with you. That intense oneness is very druglike. I mean – all these drugs are in our bodies anyway. There are ways of releasing them other than with chemicals."

Are drugs necessary to relate to Spacemen 3?

"Just a band being a band is not a good enough reason to be a band"

"No, no, I'm sure at least half our audience is straight. In the end, probably… ooh, 70 per cent. The laws are incredibly silly and archaic. But if people can get the feeling of drugs through our music, without taking any, which I know they can, then great. It just takes concentration. Closing your eyes and listening."

Um, who are the fucked-up children of the world, exactly?

"Right, well…"

Am I one? Are you one?

"It's people who feel slightly out of place, who feel that at the moment the world isn't to their suiting…"

I'm one! I'm one! Yummy!

"But I wanna change it, so those people don't feel outcast and alien, so they don't feel they have to fake their own lives…"

Ah.

"Although I do feel if people wanna take their own life they should be able to. As they can now in Holland, with the new laws. They have to do it through a doctor, and all the rest of it, it takes several months of counselling, all this stuff, but that is the way to commit suicide. Not just jumping off a tower block in a rash moment, 'cos it's illegal, 'cos you can't go and talk to anyone about it, that YOU DO NO LIKE THIS LIFE, you feel you'd be happier trying what's next, what's afterwards, than go on with this, for whatever reason. And there are a number of reasons which justify that, I think. Particularly stuff like paralysis and sudden illness and stuff.

"Having said that, when people do commit suicide through love, through drugs, it's often to do with society, because they're square pegs in round holes, this type of thing…"

Have you ever contemplated suicide?

"Yes, yes. Definitely. Uh, we'd better go to the chemist now or I'll miss it."

Right! Let's go! I'll just get my gloves!

"**LEMME SEE IF** I can find that live Stooges track I was telling you about…"

Something I can only pinpoint as Suicide interpreting Cliff Richard's "Miss You Nights" crackles from the car stereo.

"Ah, we're here…"

In Boots the chemist I am dying for a wee. Sonic Boom is having a lot of hassle at the prescription counter. An argument develops. Your on-the-spot reporter, however, has to scurry away and find a dark alley somewhere in Rugby town centre. This proves inordinately difficult. The quest reaches impressive levels of absurdity when your on-the-spot reporter is shooed away to another spot by an irate Halifax Building Society serf waving a broom.

Sometime later, your on-the-spot reporter returns to Boots the chemist and Sonic Boom is now on the telephone behind the prescription counter, telling somebody very calmly that that is their cock-up and therefore their problem and not his. When we finally depart, Sonic Boom has today's methadone, but some irritating complications with regard to tomorrow's. I have a Twix and a small bottle of Lucozade.

"Shit, I could've made some beans on toast if you'd said…"

I feel a great warmth towards Sonic Boom at this time. We go back to the red room in the beautiful house.

About your being a former heroin addict, Peter – would you rather I played that down?

"It's been in print several times, but I've only used it because – look, the only actual cure for heroin addicts is to give them heroin. Instead of methadone which they don't want, and which they'll sell. There is one doctor in London who gives his patients heroin and they live perfectly normal lives. The problems of heroin are blown out of all proportion, are totally mythical."

Er… totally? But do go on. I can handle it.

"The main problems really are overdosing, hygiene and supply. If you can't get it when you're heavily addicted, you have strict withdrawals which can lead to death. All these basic things could be eliminated by having it prescribed by a doctor. Easily. It could be done now, but it'd be blood from a stone.

"The only way they're gonna cure the 'problems' is by making everything easily available so it's not in the hands of the black market. Because doctors aren't gonna sell bum gear, they're not gonna cut it with

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shit, it's not gonna be dirty; they're gonna give you just enough to get you as high as you wanna be.

"Methadone's not a cure. 'Cos when they stop the methadone they go back to heroin. It's the nature of the drug. It's so enjoyable. It makes life very pleasurable. It's without a doubt less dangerous than alcohol, as any doctor will tell you. You can't tell that a heroin addict is a heroin addict, really. Provided they are eating properly and looking after themselves, which they're more likely to do if they're not having to mix with mafia-type characters in the black market.

"Very controversial subject. You tell people you think heroin should be decriminalised, they think it's a really bad thing. But it is the solution.

"This is part of the revolution! It sounds really careless, but – if it will help to change things – *I know*. Once an addict's tried heroin, there's very, very few that are never gonna have it again. Except it's even more unlikely than that, do you know what I mean? Most people rate sex, drugs and rock'n'roll. I think it goes drugs, sex, rock'n'roll, in that order."

All this lends an extra dimension to (astonishing) early Spacemen 3 tracks like "Losing Touch With My Mind" and "OD Catastrophe". But sexy? Is it sexy music?

"It is… beyond the point of orgasm… I think it's a very good soundtrack to almost anything, y'know?"

Some flashes:

1. Some don't enter rock'n'roll at all, do they?

"Oh yeah, sure. Farmers and stuff."

2. "I don't say they're following us as much as Loop, but I know My Bloody Valentine did change massively after playing with us, after seeing us. Really, we were ahead of the Mary Chain, too."

3. "Class structure's a crazy thing, a supposed thing…"

4."If you have desires to buy lots of things and you wanna work hard for it, that's fine, that's up to you, but it shouldn't be the be-all and end-all. Everything's run by accountants these days, isn't it? From Nike and Adidas to *Melody Maker*. Poor fucking parents, y'know? Kids whose parents are on the dole are gonna see all these toys flashed up on TV every five minutes, like 30 quid, 50 quid. To make kids want those and put their parents under such huge stress is totally wrong. Now that's one of the bad side-effects of technology."

5. Advertising is the durable new god.

"Yes, I guess it is."

6. Are you hippies?

"I know what you mean. The hippy types who'd like to buy a house in the Welsh valleys and get away from it all and grow their own stuff… Yeah, we do appeal to that audience. But basically, they're just shoving their head up their arse and pretending it doesn't exist. Rather than actively trying to change it. That's very selfish."

You're not advocating "escape", then?

"Escape and getting out of your head and all this has got its time and its place, fine. But ideally everyone should be trying to change what it is they're escaping from. So they can stay there without worrying about it."

7. Chile. Brazil. Children, fucked up or not, are shot in the street. Torture. So, what the hell are we moaning about?

"Sure, but everything's relative, isn't it? If they've got strong problems over there, they need a stronger revolution. In Chile, they ought to get off their arses more."

8. There's a whole section of society like ourselves, which we appeal to, and no one is documenting it. The nearest is the press going on about 'drugs' – those articles are either false or stupidly extreme. We're just trying to put a real perspective on it. We're documenting out times."

9. "I particularly like pop-art, because it's a very bold statement. If I was ever sent to prison it'd almost be a godsend, 'cos I'd have the time to paint again. Being locked in a cell with a guitar and some paintbrushes would be fine."

10. "Acid House is hype and bullshit. Acid makes you question things, the validity of things."

11. "Purity. Alan Vega said to me, 'You guys are as minimal as us. But man, minimal is maximal!' And he's right. The MC5 could make a one-chord song sound really complicated. Brian Wilson said, 'The definition of genius is someone who makes something complicated sound simple.' I think it works the other way, too."

12. "Just a band being a band, though I do actually enjoy it all, is not a good enough reason to be a band, like, say Dinosaur Jr."

Not even for the sheer sonic hedonistic pleasure?

"Yeah, sure. Sorry, that was almost too obvious for me to say. It's my life."

A FEW RAMSHACKLE NIGHTS later, I am spellbound by Spacemen 3 – pivots Sonic Boom and Jason – live at ULU. The arrogance of – not just the fact that they sit down but – the way they sit down. The slow-burn tease of "Rollercoaster", the whirlwind of "Suicide". And the compelling drama and tension and release of "Revolution". Some kids start bouncing about on stage at the crescendo, and they're made to get off. I thought that was a shame. Anarchy brings out my sentimental side…

When Spacemen 3 indulge in their wispy, slow air-rent ballads they're just another band. But when they enter on one of their utterly hypnotic rotations of guitar sound, simultaneously rigid and chaotic, they're truly something else.

Everyone is breaking their plastic mugs as they leave the gig, the place resounds with the clack of jackboot on beaker. But it's not October, it's November. It's a miniscule gesture in the scheme of things. But – hey, kids! – it's a gesture. Abort the analysis. Freedom is a tidy word for having nothing left to lose. Free your mind.

"Boredom is a relative thing, too. You can always do something. You can always find a book; there's always things you can do for free. From sex to painting to playing the guitar… the most beautiful things are… inexpensive…"

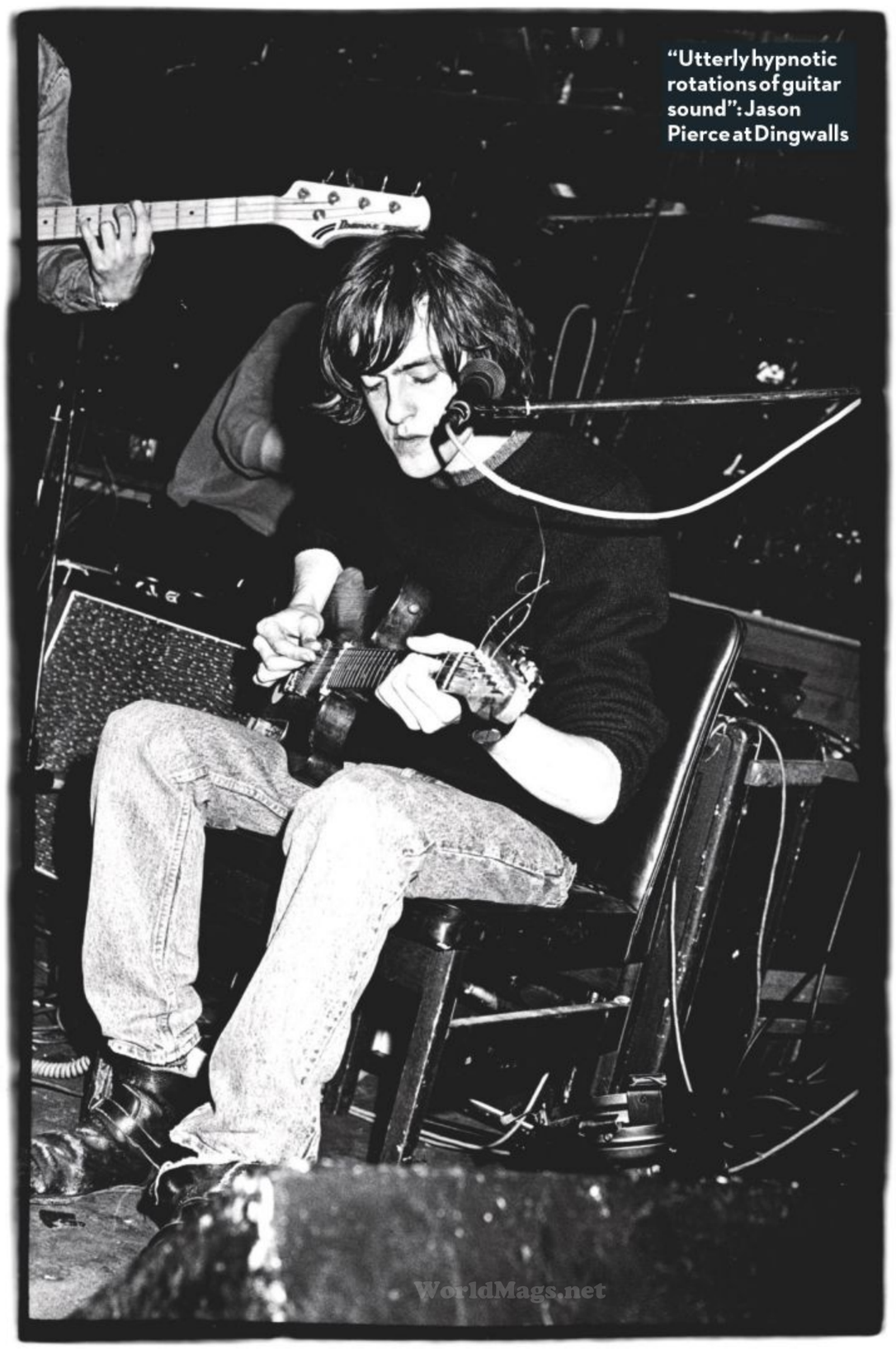
I have a sneaking suspicion some of us love our alienation really, cling on to it as a strange self-affirmation. And this might not facilitate the "coming together" Sonic Boom hopes for. In 1988, revolution per se, revolution by our definition, is not very likely. But we can twist things about, sure. We can be irritating as fuck. We can be as irritating as an asterisk.

Sonic Boom's cigarette smoke kicks, rises, curls, evaporates. He has a dream.

"I'm a lot more optimistic about what the human race is capable of than most people. Most think it's not worth it, it's too much trouble. But our forefathers were planting trees they would never see, building buildings which would last for a period in which their lifespan was inconsequential. They were building for the future, they were thinking about other people, not just about 'us' now.

"Everything now is treated as if it finishes within our lifetime, the world included. And that's not good enough. We should be thinking ahead."

Anyone doing that will have to embrace Spacemen 3. *Chris Roberts* •



"Utterly hypnotic rotations of guitar sound": Jason Pierce at Dingwalls

TIM PATON

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1988

OCTOBER–DECEMBER

The Sugarcubes in summer 1988: (clockwise from top left) Bragi Ólafsson, Sigtryggur Baldursson, Björk Guðmundsdóttir, Einar Örn Benediktsson and Þór Eldon

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“Sounds like heaven”

Watch out for the cannibal sheep… THE SUGARCUBES are back with their non sequiturs! After breaking through everywhere – except, seemingly, the UK – they are in very high spirits. So what next? “I’m going to find some kind of altitude which will interest me,” says BJÖRK.

— MELODY MAKER DECEMBER 24 —

The retaliation of the bathtubs

“THE BATHTUBS ARE RETALIATING,” says Einar. “Every bathtub, in every hotel room, in every city, is out to get me now. Sometimes they suck me in and won’t let me escape. It is getting worrying.”

Once The Sugarcubes said God was a bathtub, and the bathtubs, it would appear, were offended. The bathtubs are revolting. Cleanliness is next to fury.

Do you feel any sense of duty or responsibility?

“To our cars.”

What will the next record be like?

“Normal. Very normal.”

Like Chopin?

“Yes, if you like.”

You have no conscience?

“Never.”

Björk is in a very chirpy mood today. She demonstrates the art of singing with one hand. Then the art of singing with no hands. She can do it. It’s amazing. She has a new watch which is powered by water. You have to change the water in it every six weeks. Beer works just as well. By the way, she is wearing a silver spaceman suit.

“I think,” says Einar, “it would be interesting to be a guillotine.”

Is Paris burning?

NO, IT’S NOT. Just as well, really. The Sugarcubes have done more than 400 interviews this year. They’ve done nearly that many concerts in nearly that many places around the world. *Life’s Too Good* has sold close on 500,000 in America. It’s even cleaned up in Spain. It is now taking off in Japan and Australia, and they’ve been invited to tour Russia. Things have reached such a ludicrous level that The Sugarcubes are wondering why they’re not very successful in Britain.

“So,” says Einar, “three continents you have followed us now.” He means countries, but I’m working on it.

On Boxing Day, The Sugarcubes begin recording their second LP. It should be out around April/May, by which time there’ll be numerous videos, a single or two, and more exotic tours. Less than 18 months ago, when I first brought them to your attention (self-congratulatory whoop), they couldn’t afford toilet paper. Now they can afford to chuckle at the way some music papers (like, say, *Sounds*) are so desperate to cover them that they’ll invent an interview, attributing wads of mundane fabrications to the Icelanders’ lips. »

ANDREW CATLIN

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Paris, that fey and yet resilient fusion of romance and corn, of cathedral and peepshow, of elegance and elephantiasis, is a splendid setting for The Sugarcubes, themselves a paradox of hedonism and beatitude. They're on the home straight of their global jaunt, beyond fatigue and into, alternately, second-wind gaiety and sheer vacuity. Björk, Einar, Siggy, Bragi, Thor and latest addition, Magga, are as aromatic as basil and daft as brushes. Still, they'll stick their tongues out at any audience. And any audience will love it. They are not on any star trip, possibly because that's not within their terms of reference. The Sugarcubes' terms of reference remain different to most of ours.

Björk: "When people are not interested in The Sugarcubes any more, which will probably be by next spring, we will go out fishing whales, because we have to have jobs."

Magga: "Then we will still be able to be in the press."

Siggy: "Because, as they say in America, bad press is better than no press. You could have pictures of Sugarcubes waving harpoons with 'KILL' in their eyes."

Einar: "Of course we wouldn't kill whales, we'd hire somebody else to do it. That's what hired killers are for."

Björk: "Because now we are the richest people in Iceland."

Einar: "Bad joke."

What's it like being rich?

Björk: "Rich? Ah, I never notice it really. Other people keep telling me. But I can never manage to pay my telephone bills at the hotels, I have to get loans. I think I am rich, though.

"People in Iceland are all bringing us things. Like bills we failed to pay five years ago or something, because they think we are so rich now."

Is Paris full of lingerie and meat and famous dead people and vitamins?

YES, IT IS. "Ooh-la-la," whistles Björk as we pass one of Pigalle's 17,000 lingerie-shop windows. "Do they sell contact lenses?" enquires Einar.

"I hate that," says Magga as we pass one of Pigalle's three butchers-shop windows. "The dead meat hanging. It's so big. And really I think, 'How long has it been there?'"

"I am going to the cemeteries tomorrow," explains Bragi. "Tell me who is there." I tell him who is there. You get good value at Paris cemeteries.

"Good. And also, I believe, Apollinaire. A great poet. He was hit by shrapnel in the war, but when he came home he died of something else."

Do you have a cold?

"Yes, I am taking vitamin C, but you cannot take too much or else you just piss it. More than a certain amount and it is useless. Einar takes 100 vitamins a day."

But he's got a sore throat.

"Yes. I am not now convinced by vitamins."

Santa Claus: unlucky for some

I SAY, I say, I say, what does an Icelander do for Christmas?

Björk: "Einar goes to Greenland. He hates Christmas."

Einar: "Because I am Santa Claus. Ha! She has just realised why I hate Christmas, I am Santa Claus. All that work."

Björk: "I have just solved a problem here. Because I have to teach my baby to put a shoe in the window in Belgium at the weekend. It's a habit in Iceland which starts taking place on December 11. So I put the shoe in the window, like a Christmas stocking, and Einar, I hope, will be on the same floor as me in the hotel. You have time? You will have to dive down the walls outside and…"

Magga: "We have 13 Santa Clauses…"

Siggy: "And they are all pranksters."

Björk: "It's just one Santa Claus and he's schizophrenic, he's got 13 characters."

Siggy: "No! They are all different persons."

Einar: "And they come down from the mountains, you know, 13 days in front of Christmas."

All: "And one of them, he steals sausages, one of them slams doors, one of them blows candles out – no, no, one of them eats candles, one of them peeps at windows – ha, he is a peeping tom – one has a very big nose and can smell things from far away."

They're not very nice then, your Santa Clauses?

Einar: "Their mother and father are horrible as well."

Siggy: "The mother's a great huge hex who eats children."

Björk: "And they spy on children. If they see the child is naughty, she comes with a big, huge cat which is bigger than a human being…"

Magga: "No, that's another story. The cat only comes if the kids don't get any kind of clothing for a present. Just has to be socks, anything, or the cat will come and take them. So there has to be some sort of clothing. Maybe it's because those are the most boring packets, the soft ones. So they can say, 'Well, if you didn't have one the cat would eat you.'"

Do they wear red, these Santa Clauses?

"No – old sheep colours."

Old sheep colours?

Björk: "Black and grey and brown. Just like sheep."

Right.

Einar: "Then 13 days after Christmas, they go back to the mountains and we have the last day."

Do you have Christmas trees?

Björk: "Yes, but we import them. There are no trees in Iceland!"

Magga: "And then the elves come, and do the elves' dance…"

Now you're talking!

Siggy: "On the blow-out of Christmas, they have big bonfires and the elf king and elf queen do the elves' dance around the bonfires."

Siggy sips his coffee while I consider a yuletide getaway break in Iceland.

"People dressed up as them," he adds, nonchalantly.

Does religion come into it?

All: "Yes, Jesus – this guy that got born – he gets born every year, they say. I don't think it is so important, it's more about eating and spending your money. It's got sort of mixed up, the whole commercial thing, people spend two months' wages on it, then half the population commits suicide in January, because they maybe see reason."

Is there really a high suicide rate there?

"Yes, mainly because of the darkness in these two months."

Is it depressing?

Magga: "It is. A lot of people suffer. You need a certain amount of daylight. It really is a disease. But there is a very simple cure to this now. It's a special light you can have in the house and has the same effect as daylight."

Einar: "It's saving the Icelandic nation."

Siggy: "The whole eccentricity there of all darkness or light all day long just accelerates the rate of manic depression in people. When I was working in psychiatric wards we had a lot of phases during the year where people were going up or coming down crazily."

So weather is important, after all?

Björk: "It can exaggerate your moods without you really knowing."

Siggy: "Some more than others. There's the hereditary factor."

Have you inherited anything?

Björk: "I couldn't say so with my family. But I know about several cases."

Siggy: "You mean lunacy or just any hereditary factors in general?"

Einar: "Mine is hereditary."

Magga: "There is lunacy in my father's family also."

Are The Sugarcubes rebels?

Björk: "I still manage to shock myself once in a while. But that's OK."

Einar: "Am I rebel? I don't think so."

Bragi: "When I get drunk, I get rebellious."

Einar: "Yes, he is! He is a rebel!"

Bragi: "The morning after…"

Einar: "…he crawls with shame!"

Are you calm people?

Björk: "Calm? What is calm? Skip it then, I better just find myself a dictionary."

Are you emotional people?

Thor: "Neurotic."

Erotic?

> "We have become fuddy-duddies about hotels and food"

October 15, 1988: The Sugarcubes appear on *Saturday Night Live* with incoming keys player Margrét "Magga" Örnólfsdóttir (right)

"No, neurotic."

I feel that any added written comment from me would be superfluous at this point.

Verse from the popular song "Deus", laterally related to Santa Claus and, in a way, to the history of The Sugarcubes

"I THOUGHT I had seen everything. He wasn't white and fluffy, he just had sideburns and a quiff. He said 'hi'. I said 'hi'. I was still clean. I was squeaky clean. I was surprised. Just as you would be."

Hotel Califragilisticexpialidocius

ARE YOU THE same people who released "Birthday"?

Siggy: "Yes. In essence, yes."

Einar: "I think we are a better group since then."

We could discuss that till the cows came home. Has your attitude towards the world changed?

Siggy: "Matured a bit, but not changed."

Thor: "Just getting controlled… no, established."

This threatens to get hideously coherent for a minute, but then Björk says, "Our attitude towards hotels and restaurants has changed. Very much. That's about it."

Einar: "We have become fuddy-duddies regarding hotels and food. Once anything went, a hotel room was a hotel room, but now we get a bit depressed if we get into a boring one. We get out of them. But when we get into hotels we like, we cancel gigs in order to stay there.

"I can't eat much in a bad restaurant, I hate that. But in a good one I can't believe I'm in a good one, so I eat the same amount."

What constitutes a good hotel room? I feel this is important with regard to a rational understanding of The Sugarcubes' music and mirth.

Magga: "A pink one with plastic marble all over."

Carbuncles!

Einar: "Some look like a dormitory for eight- to 12-year-old girls. You know? They are nothing, they are white. And the BEDS! They are so tightly made up you can't get into the covers, you know? You are trying to rip it up, get the blankets out… Aaaarrhh!"

Björk: "It's like a work of art, to let the sheets and the blankets match together. 'Cos sometimes they just feel like the something, it is very nice and happy. Sometimes they just fall and you wake up in the morning with some of it all round one of your legs and some of it on the floor."

Thor: "Talk about another subject now."

Einar: "No, this is a pretty big subject for us."

Well, it is! Inside four walls could be anything!

Einar "Yes, but we've got this new song called 'Hotel', you see."

You're winding me up now, Einar.

"No. I am not."

So what's it all about?

Björk: "We don't know yet. Now the lyrics change every night. In the mind. Depending on the colouring of the hotel we are in. Whether the elevator works or not."

For latecomers, The Sugarcubes run a company in Iceland called Bad Taste. Einar describes how Bad Taste would judge a hotel.

"The first thing would be a minibar. The second would be a grand bar downstairs, not with a piano player or one cassette running. Also it would not be five-star, but about 10-star. It would have 10 servants to each guest, and you could get whatever food you wanted, even if it was Mexican. You would get as much television as you wanted. No, more than that – you would get an overdose of television. Yes. It would just be sort of overloaded with everything."

Magga: "You would never get out of there alive."

Thor: "Sounds like heaven."

Bad Taste is soon putting out two maxi-singles by Icelandic bands, and recently published two books.

Are you always in the same state when you go on stage?

Björk: "I try to take advantage of whatever mood I'm in and try to exaggerate it. That also makes it interesting because I change the songs I'm singing."

Like, happy or angry?

"Yes, but it's not as simple as that."

Do you ever walk off in a huff?

Einar: "You can't do that. You can do it for you, but you can't do it to other people."

You used to tell me you liked to "destroy the beauty" of the songs…

Einar: "Not destroy."

Björk: "Just… just… We've been playing so much recently that naturally the challenges have changed. It was: if you don't feel like singing, you don't sing. It's now: I don't want to sing the song, but I'm going to, and I'm going to threaten myself, and I'm going to find some kind of altitude which will interest me. It's challenges on a different level."

Some other new Sugarcubes song titles are – don't sue me if they change, I'm sure they will – "Shoot Him", "Planet", "Water", "Nail", "The Pump", and "Good Day To Die" or "The Day That Everything Changed".

Thanks. So will the next record be very different to the first?

"No, the same songs and everything. It will send people bored or not… It is very hard for us to talk about a new record, because we haven't recorded it. The only thing we can say is we look forward to it, and that says a lot."

What says much more is that at their hilarious, haughty, buoyant and boisterous, sold-out show that night in Elysée in Montmartre, these new songs, as first dawned on me in Boston, Massachusetts, in July, are better than 80 per cent of *Life's Too Good*.

Rigours of Babylon

BJÖRK IS OBSESSED with Boney M. Obsessed. She sings refrains and choruses from Boney M songs relentlessly. On stage she does her Boney M songs routine. Off stage she shows me a present somebody has just given her. It's Boney M's *Greatest Hits: The '88 Remixes*. Well, they're all there. It's difficult to know what to say when the greatest singer in the world is »

GETTY

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proudly showing you a Boney M record like she genuinely thinks it's great. I look at the pictures as if they're fascinating. Then I think of something to say. Ah, remixes though, bet they've spoiled them, eh?

"No!" chuckles Björk, bouncing up and down. "Now they are even better! Boom! Boom! Ba ba ba ba boom! Ba ba ba ba boom boom boom!"

I sit down for a bit. Then Björk hurls a large lump of cheese at ex-husband Thor, and it lands in his soup, the latter thus displaced all down his front. He doesn't look very pleased. It occurs to me that what with "Ma Baker" and "Rasputin" and "Belfast", Boney M didn't half get a lot of sociology in. A shame, then, that they were crap.

Another thing Björk pursues relentlessly is "good coffee". Einar, for his part, prefers cassis. And now the Nativity sketch.

The Nativity sketch

TO FURTHER BOOST your festive bumper-sized fun, the photographer has somehow persuaded The Sugarcubes to pose for a rather delightful Nativity scene photograph. Carols are dutifully sung, and also "Voulez Vous" by Abba. A lot of tearing of sheets off hotel beds is involved.

Anyway, Einar is Jesus. His pate pokes through the swaddling laundry and Björk (aka the Virgin Mary) cradles this orb. Einar painfully balances on a precarious arrangement of stools in order to convincingly appear one hour old. The others are the three wise men (bourbon and fags behind backs) and Magga is, um, whoever the other woman in the story is, her, yeah, that's the one. With time, Einar forsakes grumbling to get seriously into his role. There is madness in his method. He takes to dribbling down his cheek, breaking wind, and uttering asthmatic gargling noises.

"What's frankincense?" an agitated Thor – a wise man – demands.

Nobody really knows.

"What's myrrh?"

Nobody's quite sure.

"Anyway," Thor says, looking down at a beaming and demented Baby Einar, "you don't get no gold from me, you deviant."

So that's how it really was, all those nights ago, in humble Bethlehem. Small wonder it was humble.

The only mystery in the world

HAS TRAVEL BROADENED your minds?

Thor: "No, it has narrowed mine."

Einar: "They say the world is getting bigger every day, but it's getting smaller. For me, America was something which I never thought I would go over and see. Now I've been there and I say, 'Yeah, so what?'"

Björk: "I think the mystery gets reversed, quickly."

Is there less mystery in the world now?

"Maybe the mystery is the way they all make press of us."

Oh, we all love a break from reality. But aren't you raised on mystery and mythology in Iceland? The *Edda* and stuff?

"It's mystery to you. But Britain is mystery to us. I think American kids find more mystery and adventure in Vikings. For example, they have *He-Man And Thundercats* and comics. I mean, they're creating it."

Thor: "Everything is getting sort of similar. The only mystery I encountered on this tour was myself. I think I am the only mystery in the world. I'm just talking for myself."

Are The Sugarcubes less mysterious than before their popularity?

"Good point. I think we are confusing ignorance and mystery. If people are ignorant about you, it doesn't mean you are a mystery. It just means that people are ignorant."

Einar: "For me Margaret Thatcher is very mysterious, even though she is always in the news. I cannot understand how she can wake up in the morning."

Björk: "People are disappointed because we don't glow in the dark. Or swear things. If we just happen to be interested in talking about the sheets on our hotel rooms. Which is actually quite interesting."

Magga: "Shall we go back to that?"

Of course, we are not quite normal

BJORK: "I AM crazy about my car and I'll never be able to stop eating."

Siggy: "Yes, they've been singing a lot about their cars lately, Björk and Einar. I find that fairly amusing."

Björk: "It's a brilliant thing to get yourself a car and suddenly notice that 1989 is going to be very pretty."

Have you succeeded in your quest to be seen as normal and not a freak, Björk?

"I don't know. I've stopped worrying about that. I think you should ask somebody else, because the moment I think I'm doing the most normal and obvious thing in the world, people laugh and feel uncomfortable to be around me. Bragi is normal. Bragi, talk."

Bragi: "I'm normal."

Einar: "Well of course, we are not quite normal."

FEAR is the great motivator. I ask what frightens them. Björk says American music-business people. Einar says boredom. Thor asks me if I am a psychoanalyst. Siggy says he is trying to "overwin" his fear of hitting things. This is why he's a drummer. Then he says that he's a fish.

"I would give a fish a try, for a while at least."

Björk: "A halibut or a herring?"

Siggy: "A multicoloured one, in warm waters."

Einar: "He drinks as a fish."

Siggy: "In that fact… yes."

Einar "I would be a god."

Björk: "I would like to laugh a lot."

Bragi: "I would be a good-smelling book."

Are you not a god already, Einar?

"I don't think the biggest god would get a sore throat. Except from screaming at all the lesser gods. It would be more interesting to be… a guillotine."

Isn't that cruel?

"That's what it was made for. No compassion."

> "George Bush will choke on a banana disguised as an apple"

The beginnings of the cannibal sheep legend

WHAT WILL HAPPEN in 1989?

All: "George Bush will choke on a banana disguised as an apple, hopefully. We will make many crazy attempts at grabbing the reins of power in Iceland, and fail terribly. People's favourite subject will be to talk badly about U2… That was 1988. No, but it will get horrible, it will get really extreme. They will find new sheets that will conjure a lot of talk about whether Elvis Presley was God or not. They will put a man on the moon… and we will also realise that, for centuries, cannibal sheep have lived unseen in Iceland – in cracks."

In cracks?

Einar: "Yes! This is why there's so few of us."

Björk: "Actually, this whole bit about the high suicide rate in Iceland is bullshit. It's cannibal sheep."

Siggy: "Yes, that's a lie circulated by the cannibal sheep detectives. It's like the Mafia."

Thor: "Nobody has the guts to speak out."

Einar: "If you do, the cannibal sheep get you."

Can they understand what you say?

Björk: "Not English. This is why we can speak to you about it."

All: "Please don't print this in Icelandic… please. If you do, we're dead… He can blackmail us now, you realise."

There is only one hope.

Einar: "The only hope, which is kept close-knit by the inner family, is that you take a cod and you slit it open and you take the intestines and rub them on your forehead. That's the only guard."

Is this true? You're not just saying this so a lot of people rub cod's intestines on their foreheads?

"It's true. And now we have started exporting the Icelandic cannibal sheep all over the world."

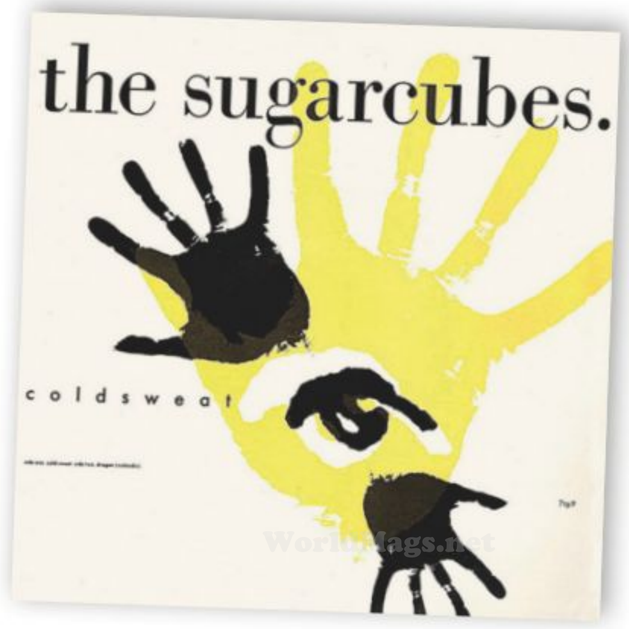
I've decided you're beat poets.

Einar: "I don't know what a beat poet is."

Siggy: "Convulsions and noise."

Björk: "Bananas and chocolate."

Something like that. Today is a birthday. *Chris Roberts* •



Readers' letters

MM/NME JUL–DEC Albini outrage, house calls, Public fawning and other imbroglios.

Rapeman: no laughing matter

On October 9, Rapeman played at Newcastle Riverside. We picketed the venue to protest at Rapeman's presence and against Riverside for allowing them to play there. We don't care how charming and intelligent Steve Albini is supposed to be – anyone who chooses to call his band Rapeman shows curious disregard for the thousands of women and children who are raped each year.

We cannot comprehend the mentality of anyone who uses the word as a form of entertainment, it sickens and offends us. In a year where people are actually celebrating the centenary of Jack The Ripper and the continuation of male sexual violence, we are not surprised to hear the arguments put forward to justify the name – all censorship is bad, words have no meaning, etc. We are even told we have no sense of humour.

Well, we don't find Rapeman amusing or entertaining. We were amazed at Riverside's lack of consideration for the views of women who use the venue, especially as they are currently hosting a women's festival.

KAREN GLOVER, ANNETTE MORAN, Newcastle (*NME* Oct 29)

I feel that it's time somebody added a voice of reason to the Rapeman issue. You see, it's like this: Washington wives decide what they think the public should or should not hear. It's called censorship. Our government decides that certain dissenters need legally silencing; this is also called censorship. But if a bunch of Leeds students try to ban a group because they don't like their name it's called upholding moral values.

I don't have to tell the *NME* about censorship, they have experienced people deciding that the public shouldn't see certain words. Now we can add Rapeman to the list; I mean, the thought of us plebeians actually thinking for ourselves, who could entertain such an idea?

Heidegger said that we have no limits to our thinking except those self-imposed or those imposed by our own death. I think we can safely add to that the limit set by Leeds University students.

LINDA OWENS, Stafford (*NME* Dec 3)

JACK MITCHELL / GETTY

Yo Danny

Danny Kelly's Public Enemy article was so sycophantic it was embarrassing. Danny Kelly was falling so far backwards to be nice to big bad Chuck D and his school-playground gang that he was prone – an insect on its back waving its legs in the air going, "Please don't step on me." All that patronising shit about practising saying, "Yo, Chuck." A bit Uncle Tom Cobblers, I think, Danny?

Unfortunately, Chuck D was too intelligent to do what was expected of him, which was to eat a couple of passing old ladies and start a riot in Brixton.

LUKE FITZGERALD, Norwich (*NME* Oct 22)

He knows where Syd Barrett lives

I would like to set the record straight concerning Syd Barrett, who was recently the subject of a *News Of The World* exclusive. The article was a mishmash of half-truths and "quotes" from neighbours who sought to paint a picture of Syd as a "zombie", a "drug-crazed hermit who barks like a dog", a "vegetable", etc, etc.

Well, to clear any doubt, here are the facts. It is true that Syd is certified as having "irreversible brain damage", but being an official classification, it is rather vague and to say Syd's a "loonie" is quite inaccurate.

On Monday (7/11/88) I went to Cambridge to where Syd lives and rang his doorbell. He answered straight away, and although he was obviously nervous, he spoke quite coherently and looked psychically [sic] healthy. He explained that he was busy and that he couldn't see anyone at the moment. I said thank you and left – with the impression that he seemed OK, in complete contrast to the *News Of The World* article.

M WELLS, London (NME Nov 26)

Acid house fans write short letters...

Yo *NME*! Two brilliant things about the ACID scene:

The music! Parents, police, pathetic "journalists", "proper"' musicians and perfectly ordinary people f***ing hate it!

Yours, LAUGHING SAM'S DICE (*NME* Dec 10)

So... acid house goers use Ecstasy and Fantasy? So what? Captain Scarlet uses Harmony, Rhapsody, Destiny and Melody. And I bet he has a much better time.

BARRY WONG, University Of Durham (*NME* Dec 10)

Now that the Old Bill are hauling in all those acid house types, perhaps you will spare a thought for similar gross infringements of civil liberties that face football supporters every Saturday. How long until you need a membership card before buying a Smiley T-shirt? Police Violence, Media Hysteria, the same clampdown.

Yours in paranoia, WILD OSCAR (*NME* Dec 10)

...while rock fans write longer ones

Am I alone in thinking that the Throbbing World Of Rock is trembling at its foundations? Is it really the case that dance, disco and all the other forms of soul the East Ends of London and Chicago have spawned are really far more interesting to write and read about than the fiery beast of guitar-orientated pop?

Is Todd Terry really as fascinating as Shane MacGowan? Is Marshall Jefferson anywhere near as charismatic as that great rocking devil Ian Astbury? Can it even be possible that the "fat Belgian bastards" you spoke of last week are in any way as caring, astute or sensitive as the likes of Morrissey, Tim Booth or Michael Stipe?

Let's face it, dance music *is* faceless, even if it is like bread from the heavens to eager clubgoers. As Mantronik once said: "Writing about music is like dancing to architecture." Please concentrate on the nutters, the genii (Smith, D'Arby) and the loudmouths, and leave the promotion of the Dance Empire to those closeted style mags who see no room for anything relating to guitars.

MICKY BUNCE, Mull (*NME* Dec 10)

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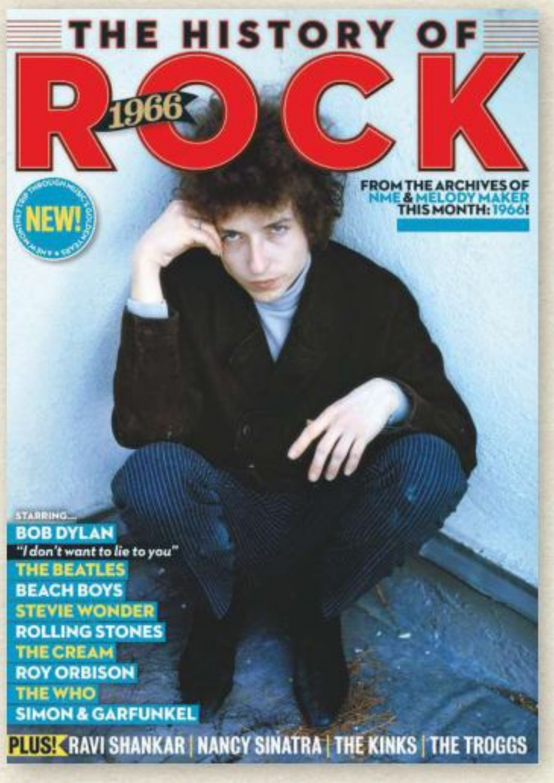
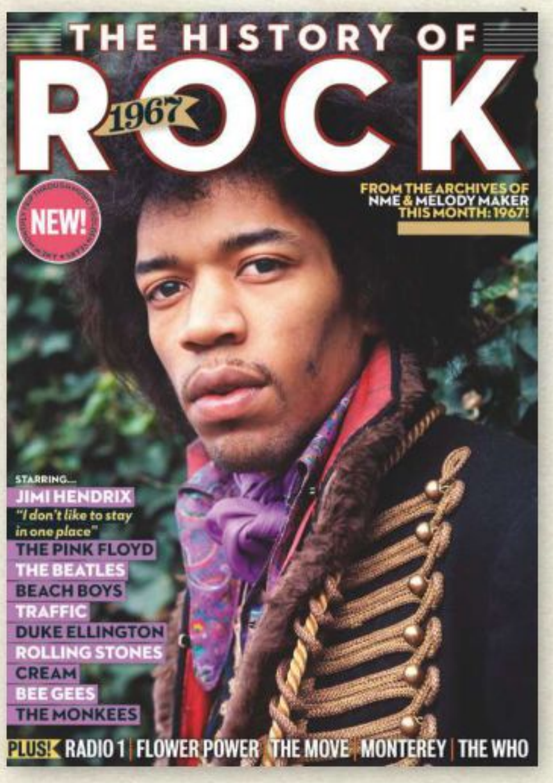
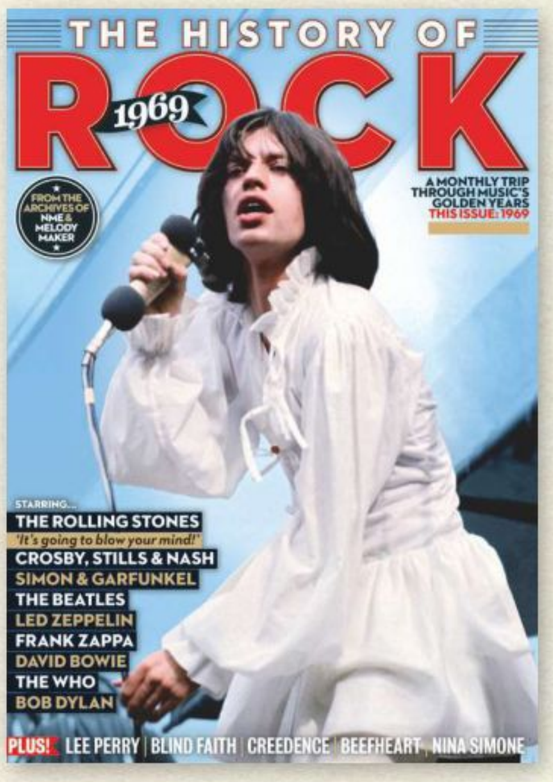
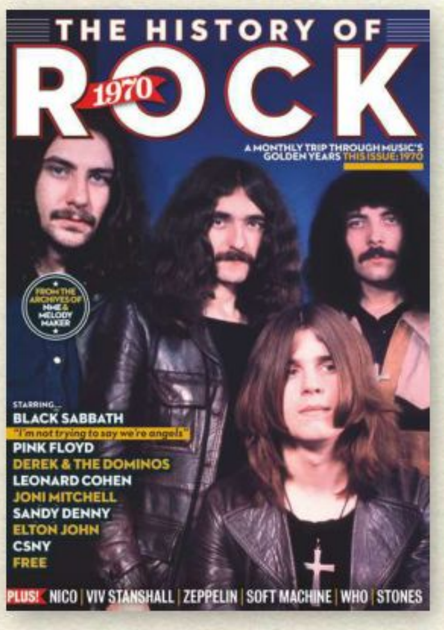
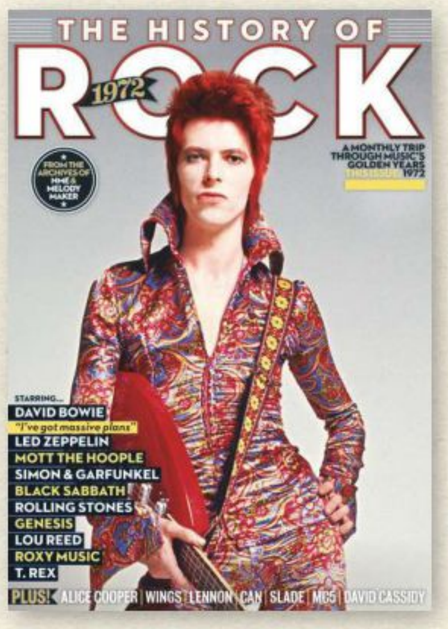
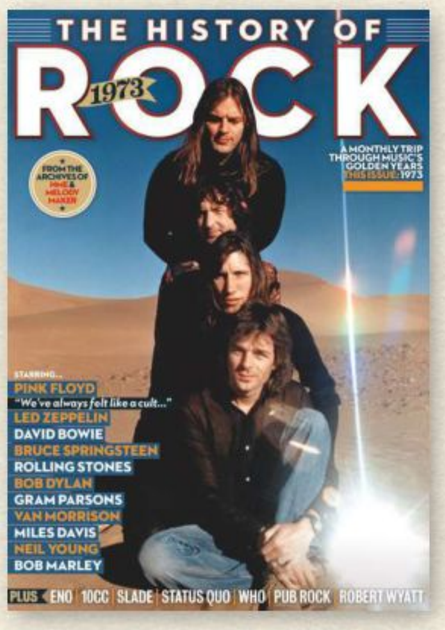


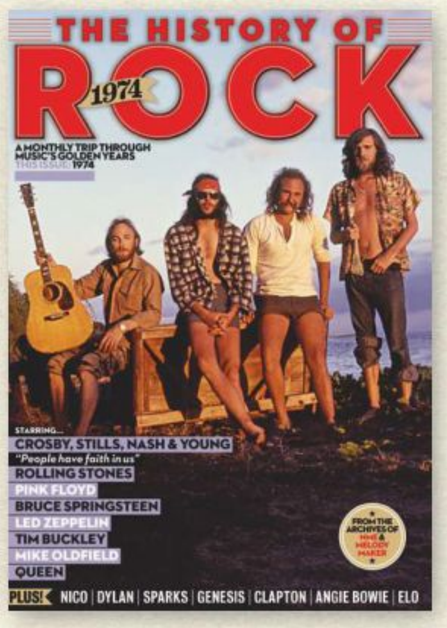




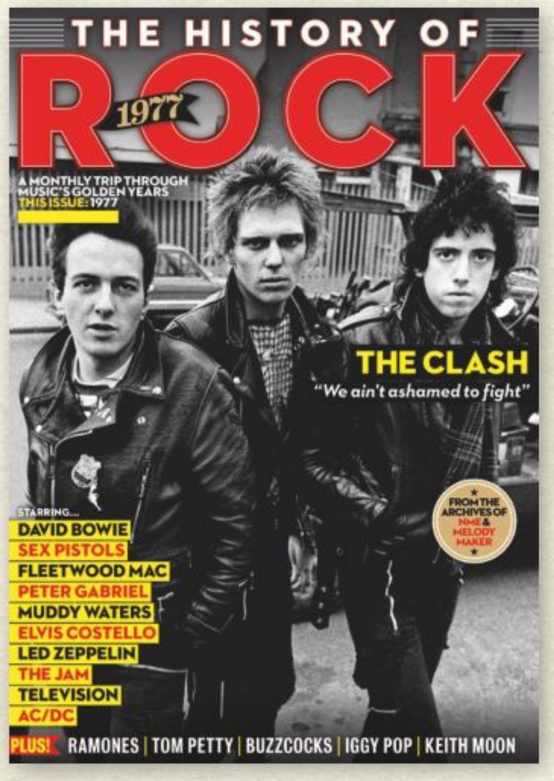


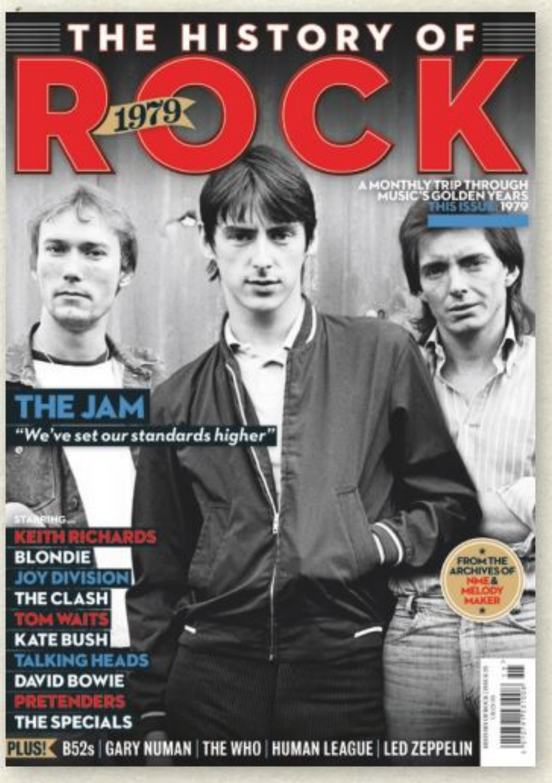


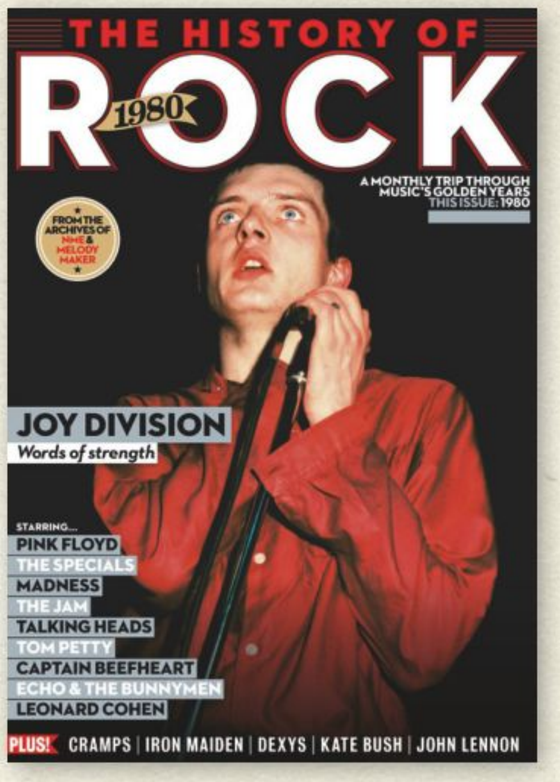


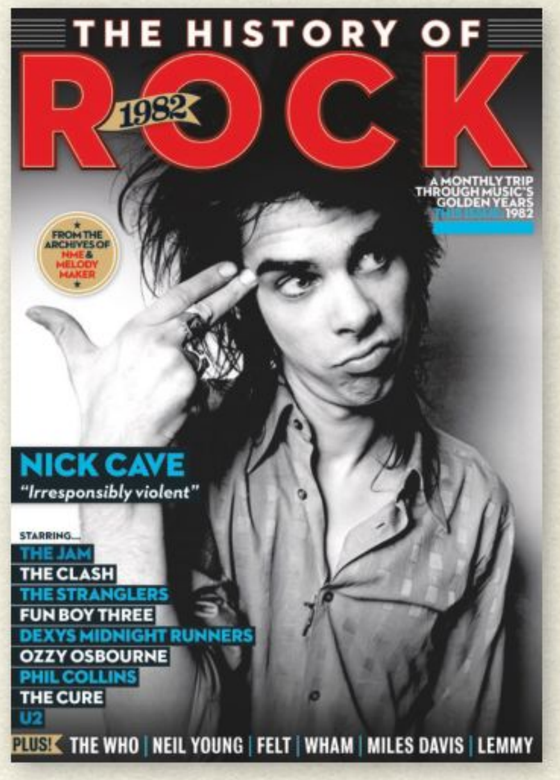


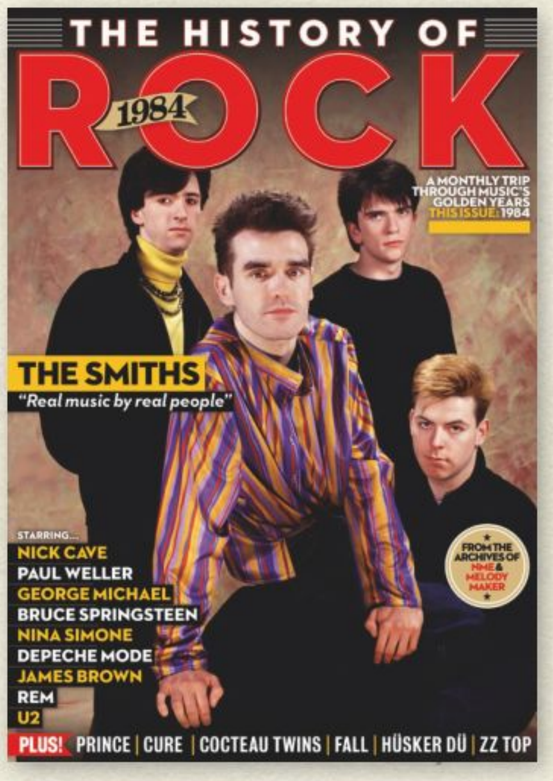
The greatest stories from the pages of *NME* and *Melody Maker* revisited in a monthly trip through music's golden years.

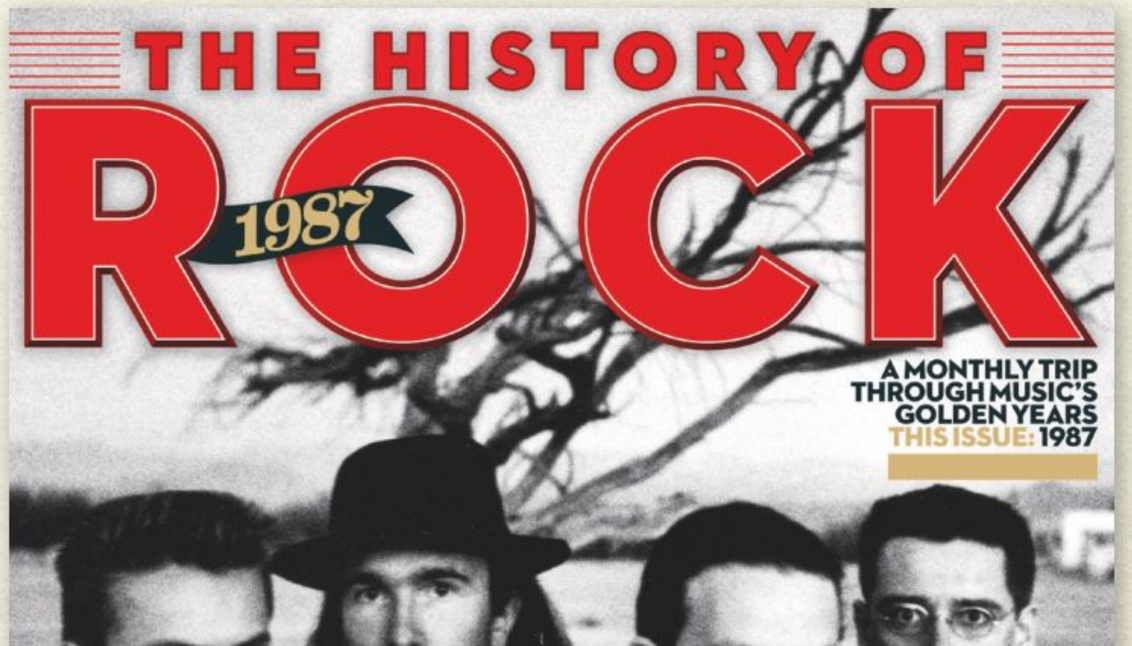


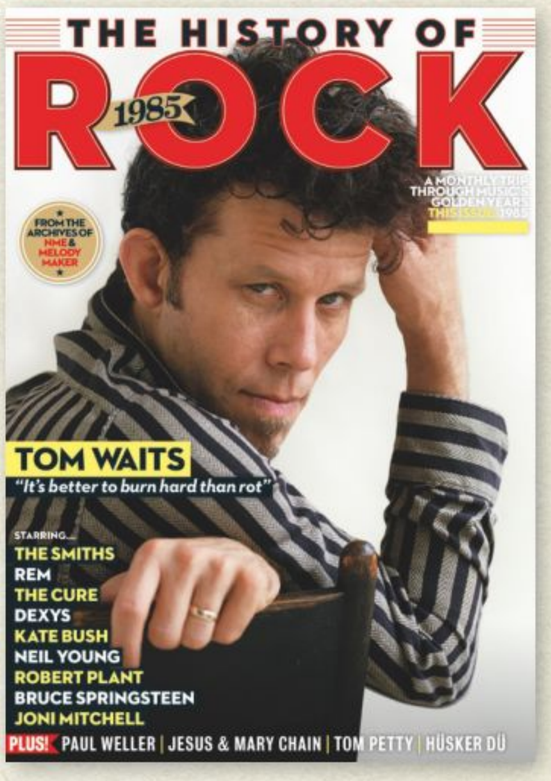


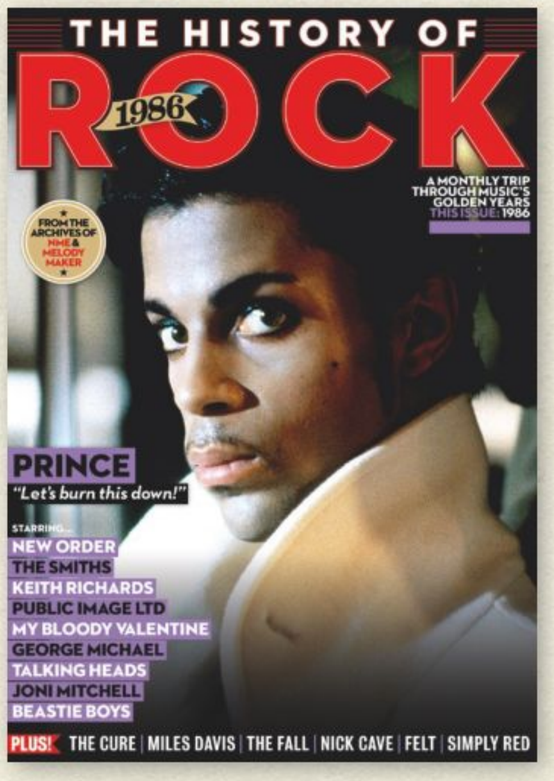












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1988

MONTH BY MONTH

Coming next... in 1989!

SO THAT WAS 1988. Hope you were like Coltrane, insane.

But that's far from it from our reporters on the beat. The staffers of *NME* and *Melody Maker* enjoyed unrivalled access to the biggest stars of the time, and cultivated a feel for the rhythms of a diversifying scene; as the times changed, so did they. While in pursuit of the truth, they unearthed stories that have come to assume mythical status.

That's very much the territory of this monthly magazine. Each month, *The History Of Rock* will be bringing you verbatim reports from the pivotal events in pop culture, one year a month, one year at a time. Next up, 1989!

DAVID BOWIE!

AFTER THE THEATRICAL behemoth of the Glass Spider Tour, Bowie goes back to basics with a new band: Tin Machine. The rough-and-ready approach yields a frank on-the-road interview. "Having done so many crack-type drugs, I know the hurt to your emotions, your physical health. I know the damage it can do."

THE STONE ROSES!

TAKING THE TEMPERATURE of the phenomenon as it grows, first in England and on into Europe. Already Ian Brown thinks onlookers might be missing the point. "People have us down as some sort of Manc scallies who spend all their time dropping acid and fucking around…"

U2!

ON TOUR WITH the band in Japan, as Bono embraces the rock'n'roll dream, his enthusiasms undiminished by the responsibilities of success. "I'll live to be 60 before I get myself together," he promises. "Then I'll be a bad motherfucker and everyone will have to watch out."

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FROM THE MAKERS OF **UNCUT**

THE HISTORY OF ROCK 1988

Every month, we revisit long-lost *NME* and *Melody Maker* interviews and piece together *The History Of Rock*. This month: 1988.
"Feel such peace and absolute/The stillness still that doesn't end..."

Relive the year...

REM WROTE THEIR "LAST POP SONG"

NICK CAVE WENT TO THE ELECTRIC CHAIR

RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS ROCKED OUT WITH THEIR SOCKS OUT

...and **THE POGUES, ROBERT PLANT, PATTI SMITH, PUBLIC ENEMY, SINEAD O'CONNOR, MORRISSEY** and many more shared everything with *NME* and *MELODY MAKER*

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